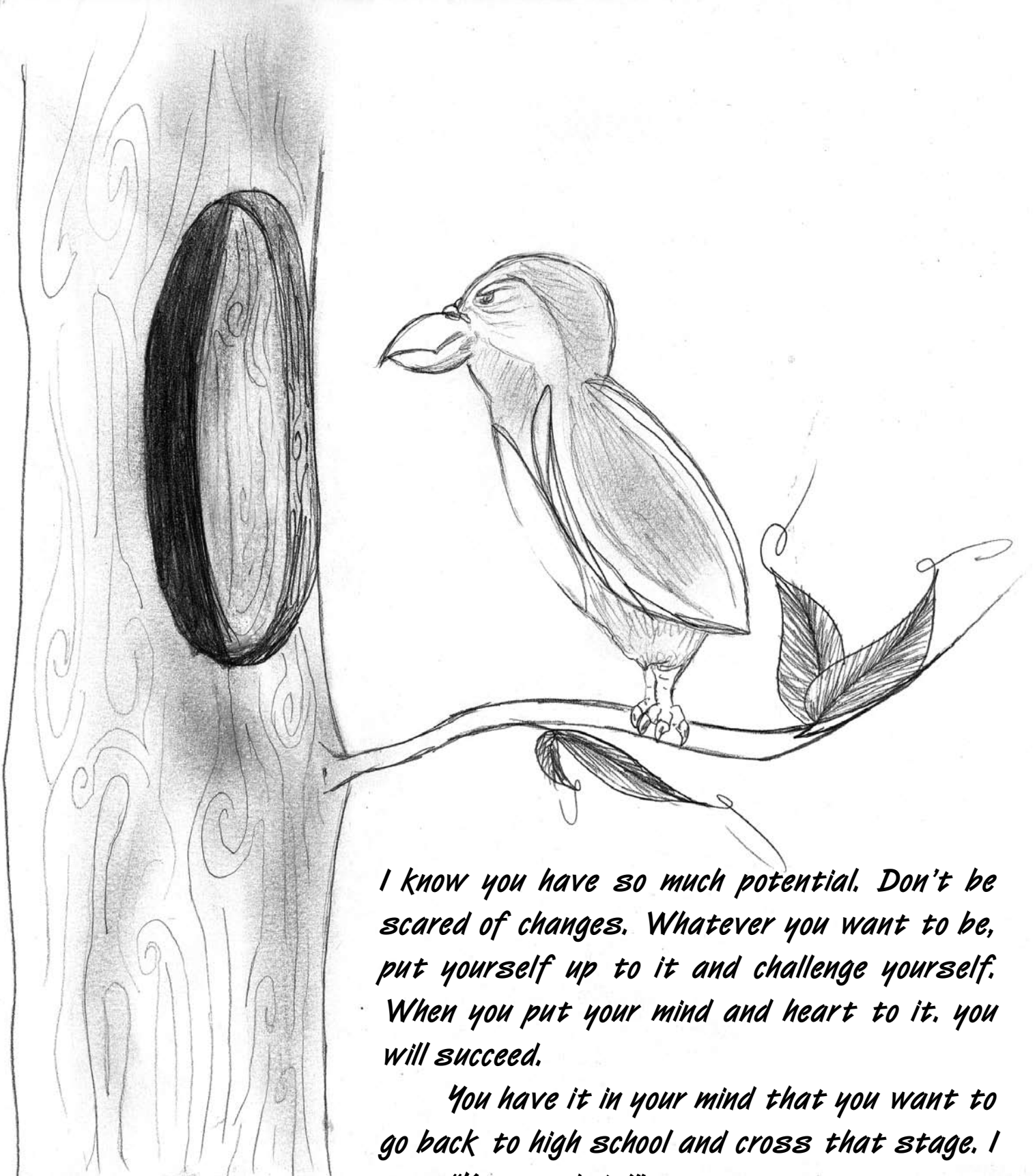




I know you have so much potential. Don't be scared of changes. Whatever you want to be, put yourself up to it and challenge yourself. When you put your mind and heart to it, you will succeed.

You have it in your mind that you want to go back to high school and cross that stage. I say, "You can do it!"

The journey of The Beat Within and all its twist and turns, oh it's hard. Some days at the office you feel so good about the work that we are doing, you're not thinking of the drama that comes from the many personalities housed in the office, you know, you block it out in order to get the work done. The Beat Within, as special of a publication/program as it is, we struggle daily in our daily attempts to "just do the work that we love," you sense the frustration, maybe even neglect from colleagues, as you feel like your hands are tied given you do not have much say in the finances, although this is something we at The Beat Within and an organization as a whole are improving on.

We can't say it enough, it's been a hard year thus far, a number of colleagues no longer work for us due to cutbacks/layoffs. Yes indeed money talks. A number of pages have been trimmed from the weekly. Plus a number of interns are sort of out of luck when it comes to gaining employment here unless we can get them partnered up through another agency who will pay them to work at The Beat office. Yet despite all of this, we still keep the workshops going at a big-time level, with the help of the counselors who understand when we are short facilitators, and have so kindly step up and facilitate run The Beat program for the young people, so no one misses a Beat!

As for this issue of The Beat Within, the topics addressed brought out some great writings, they are... "Cheating death" - Everyone lives and everyone dies. We all go through it at times, and sometimes one moment in particular stands out as that moment we might have died! We want you to describe a situation or time when you almost died, or wished that you had died or figured it should have been you instead of someone else that died. Unfortunately, we all know how death can hit you in the blink of an eye, so tell The Beat about a time you thought or believed it was all over, or should have been...

The second topic, "A letter to the new me" - Write a letter to the "new you." Think about the "old you" and what you would say to the person you want or hope to be, or the new person you've already become. What will you say? What advice will you give? What kind of encouragement will you give yourself? What will the "old you" tell the "new you" to change? What actions will you commit to as this new person? So, sit right down and write yourself a letter...

Third topic, "A hospital experience..."

Last topic, "It could have been me" - There are times when we see others - friends, family or even strangers - in certain situations, and we think to ourselves, "That could have been me." Maybe you've watched a family member or friend graduating from high school and you think, "That could have been me." Maybe a friend has become a parent too soon, and you think, "That could have been me." Or maybe you see a homie buried or permanently paralyzed, and the same thought goes through your head. So think back to a time when you watched someone else and thought to yourself, "That could have been me."

Now knowing the topics, check out the superb writing that came from these workshops!

Speaking of superb writings, guess who is working at the office? The one and only Big Vic! Yes sir, after two years confined, he is a free man! We are thrilled to have his presence in the office. If all goes well he will truly be an asset to the team as he works with us part time and

goes to college, possibly San Francisco State University. We have all gotten to know Vic pretty well through his writing. He shared plenty with us over the two years of his incarceration in the Alameda County Max unit. From his writing he has gained quite a following in the way many classic juvenile hall Beat writers have, like; OO7, Pure Dragon, Bagpipes, Baby A, Dat, Dwayne The Knowledge, to JRoc, Socrates The Scholar, Hk, and Vincent to name a few off the head. What's great is that Vic was looking at lots of time, but in the end he was released, no CYA, no county jail and no prison.

With that said, in Vic's honor, we would like to not only dedicate this issue to him, but share random Big Vic pieces from the last couple of years (and yes he is also in this issue, his last Beat workshop inside)...

Old Fast

layin' in my bed with my eyes wide open
gettin' out there fast is what i'm hopin'
tired of these voices to go with these faces
i need to get out, i need to go places
i feel isolated, like i'm in a town of racists
gotta stay calm, i don't need no more cases
i got enough weight as it is on my
shoulders

don't need no bad write-ups in my folder
my whole demeanor is getting colder
i'm hard-headed, harder than a boulder
so now i don't even want to listen
'cause all it does it get me wishin'
to get back to all those i'm missin'
but i wouldn't be here if i'd just listened
so that's kind of like a major contradiction
for the time i'm a get, there ain't no
predictin'

i wish this wasn't fact, i wish this was
fiction
i'd go back before i got the knife out the
kitchen

but i can't so it's no help
all my dreams gone, in the heat they melt
and i was damn near boiling, that's how i
felt

i got scars inside me like gettin' hit by a
belt

and everything in here is gettin' old
i hate doin' what i'm told
feelin' like a bread loaf growin' mold
i got no life no more, it's been sold
to the court who keep puttin' me on hold
and these ninjas keep thinkin' they bold
they playin' with me but i'm dead serious
my tempeture's risin', i'm gettin' furious
just don't try me, don't get too curious
'cause i'll have you feelin' delirious
i'm the real deal, not fake like a weave
so back to the point, i need to leave
now, while i'm young like steve

-Big Vic

Wars Of My Life

in this world we live with all kinds of war
nothing but hate all the way to the core
some people quit some just want more
some people keep knockin' on deaths door
right now i'm at war with myself
why do shhh that messes with my health
i'm at war just tryin' to be free
some days it get hard this shhh i can't
believe

my real emotions i just can't relieve
hate is all i perceive
i'm in a war that can't end in peace
a war in these streets with so many
deceased
a war with my family to make them happy
for a change

but change just seems so out of my range
funeral after funeral man i can't take it
so i just put a smile on my face and fake it
go to war every night with the demons in
my head

all the voices shouting won't let me go
to bed
but when i rest that's when i feel
complete
and for the night the wars end in their
defeat

-Big Vic

How

how can i love someone
without a heart
how can something end
if it never does start
how can i feel pain love hurt
if i have no emotions
i am nothing but a little fish in this vast
wide ocean

how can i see when i have no sight
how can i be a warrior when i don't have
the will to fight
how can i want something when i have no
desire

i've grown cold in this world without a fire
how can i be locked up
when i was never really free
i never really knew myself
so how can i be me

how can i become something when i have
no life
i wouldn't be in this predicament if i didn't
have a knife

how can i miss someone who really wasn't
here

my goals seem so far away now
but they were never really near
how can i be around so many but feel so
all alone

how can i consider this place a temporary
home

i feel like a cat with nine lives
but already wasted eight
maybe prison life was my fate
but why would i be destined to fail
i'm so young

my life still has a chance to sail
how could i change
when i didn't know what was wrong
how could i put myself in jail for so long
i am at the edge of the world
and i'm ready to dive

how can i die
if i was never alive

-Big Vic

All On Me

I don't think it's "all on me" yet. It will be
sooner or later, but when the time is right.
The reason it isn't all on me yet, is 'cause i
got one of the most loving families a guy
could ask for. They been here through thick
and thin, doing all they can do for me. They
been here since the day i was born and will
be here 'till the day of my death - whether
it be physically or spiritually, they will be
here!

But my time will come when i'm on my
own, when it's all on me. i'm planning on
staying with my folks till i get a steady
income, maybe even staying through college
because it will be hard to maintain between
paying for an apartment or wherever i'm
living, and paying for school books and
all that stuff. My parents said i can stay
with them as long as i'm going to school or
working. i appreciate that a lot, 'cause not
a lot of people can say that!

But once i get my career going, i'm
gonna show them love as much as i can;
and meanwhile, i will help with rent and as
much as i can while i'm living with them.
Then when i get on my own, i will take care
of myself and handle my legal business. But
i ain't gonna take advantage of my parents
and live with them till i'm thirty, ya know?
So, till next time, take care Beat readers.

-Big Vic

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

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www.thebeatwithin.org

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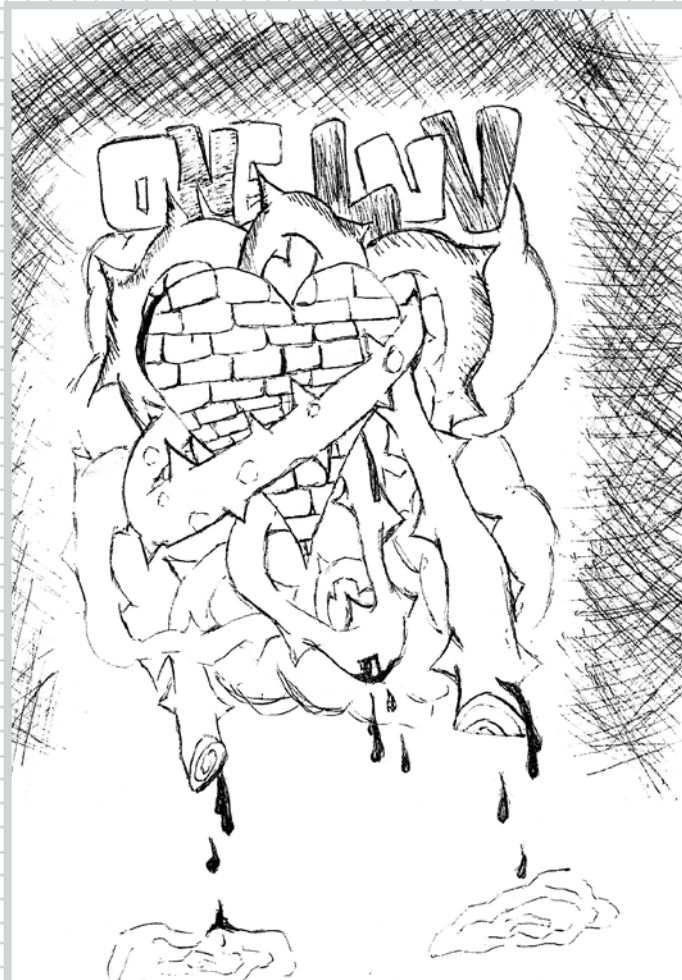
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I was happy not to have to go visit him in jail, happy not to have to feel sad anymore if my dad said he was coming to pick up me and my little brother and didn't show...

Project WHAT!

Did you know?

- Over 7 million children have a parent under the supervision of the criminal justice system, which means they have a parent who is in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole. That's one in ten of the nation's children.
- We estimate that more than 88,000 youth under age 25 in San Francisco, Alameda, and Contra Costa counties have a parent under the supervision of the criminal justice system.
- Incarceration disproportionately impacts people of color and poor people. More than 60 percent of the people in prison are racial and ethnic minorities.

The story that follows is the first in a series from Bay Area youth sharing firsthand what it's like to have a parent in prison or jail. These young authors, all of whom participate in a program called Project WHAT!—We're Here and Talking, will be featured in upcoming issues of The Beat Within. The common thread tying together these authors' stories is that each of them has had a parent incarcerated. Not all of the youth focus directly on their parent's incarceration, but they write about their own struggles, successes, dreams, and goals. This month's story is by Demel Bullock. We hope the stories inspire you and give you insight into these young people's lives.

I am proud to be the Program Director of Project WHAT! As Program Director, I have the opportunity to work closely with the talented and courageous group of teenagers and young adults who make up our team. Project WHAT! creates opportunities for the team to empower themselves and educate others by speaking out about parental incarceration.

From The Beat: We want to welcome to our pages, the first in a series from Project WHAT! There is plenty to say, and we are honored that their Program and Policy Director, Anna Wong has so kindly written the following intro to explain her program and work with us many Beat readers and has so kindly allowed us to reprint the young people's pieces in The Beat Within. We hope you like! Welcome Project WHAT!!!

Project WHAT!:

Provides participants with the opportunity for meaningful, paid work experience;

Helps participants develop skills in areas such as teamwork, writing, research, public speaking, facilitation, and fundraising; and Supports participants in achieving their life goals and ambitions.

In only one year, the Project WHAT! team has:

Reached more than 350 service providers and youth by doing presentations and trainings in the Bay Area and beyond;

Traveled to Seattle in the fall of 2006 to present at a conference (and has been accepted to present at a conference in Atlanta in the fall of 2007);

Created a resource guide for teens in the Bay Area with a parent in prison or jail. The 56-page guide answers common questions that children have when a parent is incarcerated and has a section that explains complex jail and prison visiting procedures in plain language.

Project WHAT! is a program of Community Works, a nonprofit organization based in Berkeley, California. For more information, and to access the resource guide, call us at (510) 486-2340 or go online to: HYPERLINK "<http://www.community-works-ca.org/programs/projectwhat.html>" www.community-works-ca.org/programs/projectwhat.html. If you're a young person who has a parent incarcerated and want a copy of our resource guide, we'll mail you a free copy. We hope you enjoy these stories.

— Anna Wong
Program and Policy Director
Project WHAT!

WHAT MADE ME FEEL I WASN'T A KID ANYMORE

What made me feel I wasn't a kid anymore? It wasn't turning 18. It happened earlier, the year after I got kicked out my grandma's house, when I was 15.

I was living with my dad for the first time since my early single digit years, four or five years old. It felt different, because I always got to visit him growing up, but I hadn't lived with him since I was too young to remember. I was happy to live with him again, for real—happier than a little kid riding his new bike on Christmas morning. I was happy not to have to go visit him in jail, happy not to have to feel sad anymore if my dad said he was coming to pick up me and my little brother and didn't show, happy just knowing I would be able to enjoy my dad's presence at any time of the day or night.

But as time passed, as many youngsters do, I found my way in and out of trouble—nothing big, but big enough. So after a few months went by, either Pops or myself got taller or maybe one of us shrunk—point is, we stopped seeing eye to eye. To this day, I really don't even know why. Maybe we hadn't had time to get to know, like really get to know each other, or maybe we were just too much alike. But I'm

assuming you know how it works: my house, my rules, you don't like it, I'm changing the locks, so do it moving, no looking back or making stops. I wasn't given the choice to like it or not. Just the simple get your shit and get out.

So there it was around three in the morning and I'm walking down the street with a bag that weighs more than my little brother, flipping through phone contacts, mind racing 200 mph, trying to find somewhere to go. Now a few more months passed. I'm on my own, well, living with a friend, barely sleeping, showering here, some clothes there. Just trying to make the best out of a bad situation.

Then one day I get this phone call from my auntie. "Go to the house and get your little brother so them people don't take him. They takin' your dad to jail."

What? What happened? "I'm on my way," and doing a hundred on my five point toes, I felt like my world was coming to an end. That the weight on my back could get even heavier. Is this really happening? I kept thinking, until I got there, and true enough, my dad was going to jail.

Looking for my little brother, I must have looked like a suspect. "What you doing here?" "Who are you?" "How old are you?" "Is he going to live with you?" "Where?" Question after question from the police—as if just seeing

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the police in my dad's house wasn't bad enough. I couldn't tell them I was only 16, didn't have a home of my own-- the whole thing became even scarier. My dad was going to jail, and I watch Court TV-- isn't lying to the police a crime in itself? But with bottom lip trembling and legs shaking, I got through it and end up convincing them I was legit. Or maybe they really didn't even care and just had to say they asked.

The world seemed to spin a little faster, as everything was now on me: school clothes, rent, food, "I wanna go here," "I wanna go there." All on me. Taking care of a kid when when most older people still called me a baby. I'd rather not go into details about how I pulled it off, and yeah, there were people I could have turned to for help, but they weren't there when we were babies and really needed them, so I figured we didn't need them now. So with my I'll-Do-It-Myself, I-Don't-Need-Anyone, We-All-We-Got attitude, and most importantly the hedge of protection that I know God placed upon us, we got situated in an apartment and got through the next few months.

Then, as the neighbors started to get nosier than they already were, and started to run they mouth, the building manager started to investigate, and faking the grown-ups would be home shortly was getting tiresome. Have you ever had a feeling someone was watching you? It's a cold feeling. Now here that manager go with the question and answer game: "How old are you?" "Who all lives here? Enough said, it was time to find another place to reside.

With my back against the ropes, I was still fighting my inner self, trying to avoid asking anyone for anything, for the simple fact that it always seems to get thrown back in my face at some point. I don't like to hear "I did this for you, I did that for you" down the line. And I don't like to owe anybody anything. Asking for help has always been one of the hardest things for me to do.

But with a 30-day notice on our door, and a slim chance of getting a new one when I wasn't 18 yet, what could I do now? Flipping through phone contacts once again, I finally thought to call my big sister. She had actually insisted on helping with everything from the beginning, but I had always told her we was cool, we didn't need nothing and everything was fine, even if it wasn't. My grandma had always said a closed mouth don't get fed, but hey, we was eating. Still, looking back now, asking my sister for help seems as simple as the scripture, "Ask and you shall receive."

So, the fog started to clear, and it began looking a little better for the home team. We had a new apartment, which meant a new beginning. A couple months later, my dad got out. No hard feelings --I love him, and he'll always be my dad.

It was time to move forward with life. I went to Job Corps looking to get a trade and finish up school. But soon, I found my way back into some trouble. No wait, trouble found me. Like really knocked on my door one night. But I'm not one to point the finger--I take responsibility for my actions.

So there I was in jail, on the other side of the glass, in the shoes my dad once wore, given nothing but time to think about my life, what I wanted to happen in it, my little brother, and who he might become if he didn't have anyone but the deceased rapper Mac Dre (RIP) to look up to.

I thought about the past year, and what I needed to do to make things better. How things that you simply take for granted can be taken from you, and then you have to fend for yourself. I learned to accept the fact that I do and will need people's help at certain points. I even produced some patience.

So yeah, if anyone was to ask me, I believe what you go through in life makes you who you are. Through it all I got to see my reflection without a mirror and tell myself, step it up and get it together 'cause the world don't see you as a kid anymore.

So here I am today, sharing my story with you all. I'm now 20 years old, going to Laney College in Oakland, California, and working with Project WHAT to build a training curriculum for teachers and social workers, in hoping to better the lives of others who have dealt with their parent/s being incarcerated.

Still dealing with some of my old ways of thinking. Like, when school started I didn't have enough money to pay for the books I needed for my business and real estate classes, and I really didn't want to ask my dad for help. I was telling my brother, "I think I'm going to quit school because I don't have enough money." Then the next day, my dad gave me the money for my books and told me I didn't owe him anything and just to pay him back with success. I plan to repay that debt, plus interest. You will be hearing from me.

-De'Mel Bullock, Project WHAT!



Can You?

Can you be a person without a heart and a soul?

Where my emotions used to be, now it's a hole.

Can you live life without a care in the world?

Ain't nothing seems steady, everything seems to twirl.

Can someone really love you if they don't really know you?

I wish I could show you, but I don't know what's true.

Can you break out of the trends and be more realistic?

No jail, die old, I can't become a statistic.

Can you succeed in life with two strikes on your back?

I'm not sure if I can stay on the right track.

Can you see the whole world with only one point of view?

My life's never been parallel, always at a skew.

Can you breathe each day knowin' you might not live to see tomorrow?

I can't cause others to live their life in sorrow.

Can you continue living when all have given up on your future?

I stay connected to my life like a suture.

Can you give up 'casue you lost two years plus of your teens?

Not me, never, 'cause I'm gonna accomplish all my dreams.

-Big Vic, Alameda

From The Beat: That you are my friend. It is an honor to have you working at The Beat Within, handling business!!

First of all, I would like to say thank God for waking me up to write this paper. Amen!

My Life In The World

What would you be if it wasn't for the drugs and money,
No blocks no guns what would you do up in these streets?

What would you do if you can't get a meal?

Can't eat, can't sleep, tell me how would you feel?

And if you ain't gotta roof over your head,

Sleeping in the street instead of in your own bed,

That's true life in certain parts of the world,

Be thankful for what you got in this part of world,

In this part of the world it's not really a struggle,

It's just that black on black crime for the money and trying to bubble,

We put it on our self 'cause really we got it good,

Money took over our mind destroying the neighborhoods,

If we didn't have the block and the money and all the tools,,

We will be getting education and probably just going to school,

Following all the rules getting smart and gaining knowledge,

Not the street knowledge I'm talking about going to college,

But we stuck...we stuck in this poverty,

We focused on one thing that's becoming a hood celebrity,

We still young we should never give up hope,

The world is in our hands when we worried about slanging dope,

The ones we lost in the streets just imagine what they can be

But now they gone RIP'd in this street industry,

Damn, I got the best of both worlds,

Don't let the street life get to you,

How could you change this, tell me what you would do?

-Smf, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You deliver one powerful flow of the dark life of drugs and money. You also bring the piece around full circle in warning us readers not to allow hood sickness to get the best of you.

Life Saving Surgery

It all started when I was five. My mom started to see that something was wrong with my left eye. What she noticed was that it looked like my eye was growing out. So she told my doctor and he said it was nothing. He said that a couple of eye drops would fix it.

That happened and my mom could see that it didn't do any good. She was still worried about me and took me to an eye specialist, and they did an MRI. And they said I had a tumor and that they'd have to do an operation on me from ear to ear. They opened up my head and cut my skull open. They moved my brain to the back and worked on the tumor. When they were done they put everything back together.

When I woke up I remember seeing the nurse. I started to throw up. There were bandages on my head and I was hella dizzy. That saved my left eye and all I have now is this big scar on my head that you can see right away.

-Jose, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: This is an amazing story. We're glad that your mom didn't take the first doctor's advice. What did your experience in the hospital teach you about life? We'd like to hear more about the effects of your operation. That scar you talk about is a small price to pay for keeping your eyesight. You are a lucky fellow.

A Letter To The New Me

My letter to the new me would go like this:

What's up Kevin. You finally made it. You proved to everybody that you could be successful and be a great father. I'm proud of you.

I remember when you were saying that you would end up in prison, no matter what. It's expected of you. Well, I guess you really thought about your life. I remember that the old you would do stupid things and hang with the wrong people and commit crimes.

The new you (that's me) has a job, a beautiful daughter, and girlfriend who is always by your side. My advice for you, Kevin, is this: the next time you think about going out and doing something you know will put you behind bars, pick up your daughter and give her a kiss. Then you will realize what you would lose. Stay away from the wrong crowd. You've made it.

-Kevin, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Wonderful letter Kevin. It made us cry. Don't you ever, ever, forget about that daughter of yours. You can pick her up, anytime, even in your imagination.

A Letter To The New Me

First of all, I would like to say thank God for waking me up to write this paper. Amen!

When I get out, it's going to be a brand new me. When I get out, I'm going to go to school and get a job. When I get out, I'm not going to rob anybody. When I get out, I'm going to stay home. When I get out, I'm going to change my life around. When I get out, I'm going to be a changed man. And I promise you these things I'm telling you.

-Chucky, San Francisco

From The Beat: We love your list of things you're going to do when you get out. This is a blueprint for success. Where do you think these changes — if you keep your promise — will take you?

Mom

Four years have gone by and I still ain't got over it.
 You being gone ain't easy to deal with.
 I can't stand the fact that the woman who gave birth to
 me is gone.
 Why you leave me down here all alone?
 Even with Rob by my side, I still ain't strong.
 I miss you hella much.
 You was the only person that could give that mother's
 touch.
 I think about you every day.
 Wondering why hasn't God took me away?
 I went through a lot after you left.
 Your death on my life has caused so much stress.
 Is this what God had in store for me?
 Is this how he wanted my life to be?
 Is this what they call destiny?
 Everybody always tellin' me that you gotta let it go.
 And I say to them if your mom was dead, could you let it
 go?
 Everything I told you, you took to yo' ashes.
 Damn Mom, you was one hell of an activist.
 I know you havin' fun kickin' it with Big Butchie and yo'
 favorite rapper 2Pac.
 Now I'm starin' at the world through my rear view.
 Damn Mom
 I miss hearin' you

-Tigger, Alameda

From The Beat: It is hard to find words after reading your touching and thoughtful piece. Your tribute to your Mom moved this editor very deeply. You have been a pleasure to work with at 150, and we hope that you will follow your Mom's example and live a life of integrity and love. She would want you to take your focus away from the rearview mirror and turn your attention to the road ahead. You have so much to give the world. Her voice and her love will always stay with you.

Life

Life is life,
 We all live, we all die.
 As we go through the game
 Some live in fantasies
 And some live in nightmares, like me.
 Some see a lot of money
 And some live in poverty.
 Many live in the gang life
 Others keep it low and get a wife.
 As for me, I was given the dark side
 I live a life of gang banging and I am ready to die.
 Mobbing through my block
 I see a cop and step back a notch
 Next thing you know I am back in juvie.
 No mail, no visits, only memories.
 The people on the bright side
 Live a life of money and rides.
 They spend their time in activities and sports
 They've never been to court.
 But after all, life is life
 We all live, we all die.

-Chico, Santa Clara

From The Beat: You have skills that reveal a thinker. There are few enough thinkers in the world that we have to push you to get to those deeper thoughts for us. For example, if you were "given the dark side," does that mean you are forced to accept this "gift" for all time? Doesn't there come a time as you mature that, whatever you were given, you are now able to weigh the plusses and minuses for yourself and make your own more informed choices? We know it's not as easy as just saying, "Oh, okay, I'll choose B instead of A," but we also know that what was given you has not been easy. You describe yourself as living "in nightmares." Our view is that while it may be more difficult in the sort run to make different decisions about how you live, it's the only hope for the long run. Do you care about a long run?

Called His Bluff

I would like to talk about a moment when I almost died.
 At the time I was foolish
 because I was raised and thought not to fear in the
 streets and it was like any other day
 of gang banging with the homies,
 feeling untouchable which is a very stupid feeling,
 because when I realized it, I was slippin'
 with a gun in my face and at the moment I didn't care
 to the point where I told him to shoot,
 but it wasn't 'till the day after I thought what if he had
 pulled the trigger?
 What would have happened?
 How would my friends and family have suffered?
 Now I would think twice than to be caught slippin' in the
 streets.
 I would like to tell everybody to think everything twice
 not just act on impulse.

-Sneaky, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Damn, you are one lucky youngsta. Another shot at life. Are you still a down homie or are you beyond the bull shhh? Hopefully you have seen the light and a new way on how to live.

It Could Have Been Me

That kid getting good grades, winning school awards,
 learning new things,
 That could of been me.
 That kid joining sports and clubs, giving it his all,
 That could of been me.
 That kid making friends, having innocent fun, living a
 guilt free life,
 That could of been me.
 That kid spending time with his family receiving and
 sharing love,
 That could of been me.
 That kid making it, getting a bright future, seeing the
 light,
 That could of been me...
 That could of been me...

-Viet Tiger, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Now, on with the future! No longer can you make regrets if you are serious about bettering your life! Capture your dreams! Work on upgrading and bettering your life. You have tremendous potential.

It Could Have Been Me

On April 18, 2006, everybody was in front of my house playin' football. Then my brother took me to go get something to eat and dropped me off 'cause it was a school night. I would usually go with him to go pick some money up from one of his girls, but he said it was too late. So him and my other big brother went. They had left my other brother 'cause he was taking too long in the bathroom.

When they left, I told them to be safe, 'cause for some reason, something in my head told me to say that. Next thing you know, my mom wake me up, talking bout we gotta go to the hospital cause my brother got shot. It was 12:15am.

We got to the hospital at 12:45am, and my other brother that was with my brother that got shot wasn't there. He was in the investigation room.

At 2:01am, the doctor came out and said, "I'm not going to delay you any longer, your son is dead". And all I thought was, that could have been me. RIP Omezy.

-Pooka, Alameda

From The Beat: We are so sorry for your loss. Hopefully you will take your own advice following this tragic event, and "be safe".

Freaks And Geniuses

This for them children who's parentless
 Just like me
 I been parentless for eighteen years
 And they still ain't appeared
 But I'll travel the world
 But I hope for better days
 I was doing wrong
 So long
 That I forgot the right way
 So I take that box out
 And throw my bad life away
 That wasn't me actin' the devil
 Used my protégé
 But what hole to take
 And start digging my new tunnel to life?
 I was once with the devil
 Now I am gliding with Christ
 Speak now or forever hold your peace
 I am talking to the deceased
 Death lurks around the city
 So the murders increase
 Yet I still sleep
 As I pray for peace
 The fruits of life is there
 All I gotta do is reach
 It's more knowledge in the books
 So I let them teach
 'Cause one day that same knowledge
 I'll be able to preach
 No lie
 I gotta keep my head up
 'Cause misery loves company
 But me, I disapprove
 'Cause me agreeing
 Is like ha Stella got her groove
 Just like sex is only good
 When you're feeling in the mood
 But when you tell that man, "No"
 He thinks you're being rude
 But is it crude
 To kill your child
 By having a abortion?
 Or get divorced for the money?
 Just so you could have your portion?
 So why rape?
 It don't feel good when you' forcing
 Listen to your heart
 Damn, Dark Side

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: You usually don't write about yourself, personally. If you ever feel like it, why don't you write for The Beat about what happened to your family? Who raised you? Who do you consider your family now? How did the devil get to you? How did you learn to resist him? You already have a whole lot of knowledge, especially when you write about forcing sex against your mood or against anyone else, and about any kind of deceit. Where do you get your amazing inspirations? Keep up the fabulous raps/poetry!

A Letter To The New Me

Change, change your ways!
 Stop BSing yourself!
 You are putting yourself in jeopardy.
 I know you better.
 You could do greater.
 I know you want all eyes on you to see you succeed.
 Do you wanna see yourself six feet under over gangs?
 It ain't worth it!
 Your life is precious!
 You have your mother and brother, what else you need?
 All you need to do is succeed.
 You know you could get diabetes, so stop eating candy.
 Stop hurting yourself.
 Stop letting people put you down.
 You better and stay strong, ma...
 Beautiful and worth a lot.
 So what you going to do?
 You strong, almost done with high school,
 Smart, resilient.
 You could do anything.
 Remember, you wanna be a basketball player.
 You are greater.
 Help moms. Stop leaving her by herself.
 Help her. Love her.
 I rather be dead instead of dealing with this pain.
 I'm tired of this life struggle, confused, feeling angry.
 I'm going to be in her till Sept.
 Man, I wanna become a better person.

-Lucero, San Francisco

From The Beat: What a wonderful letter to yourself, Lucero. Wanting to become a better person is the first step to becoming that person. You have so much going for you. Don't throw it all away on foolishness. You know (and we know) what you're capable of. Now is the time to demonstrate those capabilities. Will it be easy? Of course not. But the pain of your struggle proves that it's not easy the way you've been doing things, either. So we hope you make the hard choices now for the much easier consequences later.

Thoughts, It Could Have Been Me...

My hand shakes,
 my minds racing,
 my life is in a constant state of panic.
 Though life moves more slowly around me here then
 anywhere.
 A new girl
 an old friend,
 bars,
 walls and commands.
 Too many things to worry about.
 Too many things to contemplate.
 Too many things, and too much time,
 far too much time to think...
 My arms are weak
 my mind is cloudy, and now I'm six years old
 screaming with no one around.
 Wishing I could warn myself.
 Yell, yell and scream, and cry, cry out...
 But now I sit and look, at blank paper.
 I see the person sitting next to me, and see him
 writing...
 and think to myself, it could have been me.

-Nicholas, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: It sounds like you made a call for help at the age of 6, but when you did there was no one around to give you that help. Just maybe, had you called out a little louder then someone may have heard you to give you the help you needed. Don't give up; keep asking for the help you want. From the sounds of it there is much going on that requires more then just your attention. Talk to the professionals that can help you, its not easy, but in the long run it will help out more then you could ever believe.

*Do you wanna see yourself
 six feet under over gangs?
 It ain't worth it!
 Your life is precious!*



Howling At The Moon for Dark Side

My heart is screaming knowledge
 For all the chains that enslaved my people
 For the whites said that my skin color is not equal
 But we are strong as one together
 My people
 Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King
 They all had a dream
 Even though they didn't think
 That we deserved to be human beings
 My pain is greater than the world combined
 Because in my mind
 I know that we are scared of the unknown
 To us, succeeding is like
 Being in the danger zone
 Scream for me
 If you feel like
 This poem touched ya
 For all you scientists know
 That we are not animals
 Escaped from the zoo
 And if we come together
 We are stronger than glue
 I love life
 Just not his card that was dealt
 But it must have been
 Something the devil felt
 Would destroy me
 But I still breathe every second, every hour
 And as I write, my pen shoots words
 So I gave this paper a shower
 Just thinking my soul is beautiful
 Like a single flower
 Y'all clap it up for me
 And read my poems on BET
 Just 'cause I turned square now
 Don't mean I am a wannabee
 You would wanna see
 The right side
 And always the light side
 'Cause when the night rise
 The wolf comes out
 Now I am howling at the moon
 So turn your lights out
 I am Dark Side
 Damn Dark Side

-Dark Side, San Francisco

From The Beat: Beautiful poem. Anyone who tries to teach you that your skin color renders you in any way inferior is ignorant, cruel and wrong. You're so right to disregard what they say. You have a whole lot of strengths and talents you're just now discovering, so keep on searching! You have lots more to have revealed to you!

Special Survivor

Tell all my peoples I'm a happy survivor
 That made it through a warful time
 Many people witness the same story
 Of being to hell and back maybe still inside
 I made my life
 It's a real story
 so you can read about a special young gangsta that's
 moving to a different life
 Everyday I want to go far far away
 And live my life a little better
 Been through tragic moments of a teen
 And sometimes I laugh and cry just from remembering
 'Cause I'll never forget all the tears and pain I faced
 I surrounded myself with a gang at age ten years old
 A classic gang if you know me from the cuts
 Each night I think as I lay down about everybody in my
 life
 My family, friends, and those I'm gonna have to cut loose
 Emotional as this got me feeling I don't know what to do
 From my son to my friends is stuck in my head
 I need help and some answers to fill my brain
 So this emptiness of thoughts can stop
 This is my life that's going down a dead end
 My thoughts aren't secretive I'm expressing my heart
 Now my head is coming out of the dark

-Lil' Papa, Alameda

From The Beat: Incredibly heartfelt piece. You are making such a difference right now with the lyrics you shed on us readers each week. This gives many of us hope as well as yourself. You need to continue to express, examine and question who you are and where you are going, this will definitely help you down the road, and help your son understand that his daddy is great man making a difference in his life.

*I still breathe every second, every hour
 And as I write, my pen shoots words
 So I gave this paper a shower
 Just thinking my soul is beautiful
 Like a single flower*

How I Cheat Death

I place a collect call to my folks
 I can already feel what's wrong 'cause the emotion when
 they spoke.
 They tell me of tales about the people fallin'
 Listening to this I kinda regret callin'.
 They inform me of multiple homicides
 Listing names and how they died.
 She tells me of men killing their own family
 It starts to kill me because I feel as if they are too blind
 to see
 What they are truly doing
 Encouraging people to continue the shootings.
 And realizing this I feel safer in this locked chest
 And every day I live I feel that I have successfully
 cheated death.

-Giovanni, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is a great poem, Giovanni. There is a kind of safety in being taken off these mean streets, but the hall is only a safe haven if you use it to figure out how to remain safe when you're out of it. Do you have a plan for that?

A Letter Of Reflection To The New Me

Behind this wall I think about what I could do with my life and what I could become in my life. Behind these walls, I think about changing my ways toward my mom and others, but when I am outside these walls, I don't think about what I am going to do to get myself in trouble or to do something to hurt people in many ways, but inside these walls I feel sorry for the people I hurt and care about like my mom. I hurt her in many ways by my actions, but for all my action my reactions come on my mom in many way. That's why I have to change for my mom's life and my life, yet most importantly my family, and my future life, that's why I have to change.

-Vincent, Alameda

From The Beat: While incarcerated given all we have is time alone, especially in our rooms (cells), many of us think of ways to improve ourselves, yet you are so right, when you say that once we are free how our thinking changes (for better or for worse), back to our old ways. Well, you need to soul search and figure out how you won't forget about family and your future when you return home. This is a great start!!!

A Letter To The New Me

The old me still smokes
The new me don't smoke
The old me is a thief
The new me ain't
The old me is a cheater
The new me ain't
The old me sell drugs
The new me don't
The old me is afraid of death
The new me ain't
The old me was afraid of love
The new me ain't
The old me talk a lot
The new me is quiet
The old me is disrespectful
The new me ain't
The old me will end up like my Dad
The new me ain't

-Dmarcus, Alameda

From The Beat: Change is a very difficult thing. So is recognizing some of our old fears, doubts and habits. Through discovering yourself, you will open so many new doors. Thank you for the inspiring poem.

It Could Have Been Me

I was twelve years old, the day started like any other. Woke up, ate breakfast, and went to school. The usual right? The day went by smoothly, first through fourth period, lunch through sixth.

The day ended, it was me, my friend Jennifer, and my sister we were all walking up the street to the Tramway Bridge, like usual my sister was dragging behind so Jennifer said we should just skip the bridge and just cross the street.

I said, "ok, but let me get my sister first so go ahead with out me."

I turned around to get her, but turned back around because I heard a quick scream and seen my friend get hit by a car. The paramedics said she died instantly. If it wasn't for my sister being slow. It could have been me.

-Bugs, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: We are truly sorry to hear about your friend. Had you not turned around to get your sister you may not have been here to tell us this story. We hope you and your sister have received some counseling for your loss. Not just for the loss of your friend, but for the fact that you both were right there when it happened. That is a hard thing to cope with by your self, remember help is only a phone call away.

Cheating Death When I Wanted To Go

When I cheated death I was mad because I wanted to die so bad. I guess it wasn't meant to be because my homie came into my room and started to cry, and he took me down and started to slap me. I woke up and asked him what happened and he told me that I hung my self, and then things started to come back to me slowly then I remember taking the string off my shorts and put it around my neck. Then I tied it around a pole in my closet, and then I remember everything went black.

I felt like every thing was better and there was not a thing to worry about any more.

To this day I am lucky he came and took me down because now I have a little girl on the way and there is nothing in the world that can make me want to do that again. I am going to cherish the times we have together and that's a promise I made to my self that she isn't going to grow up with out a father like I did. That's how I cheated death.

-Michael, Land Of Enchantment

From The Beat: It's good to know that your friend saved you. It is also good to hear that you would never do something like this again. If the thought of harming yourself or anyone else, please ask for help before you go through with it. There is help everywhere, all you have to do is pick up the phone and dial a number. If nothing else think of your little girl.

*You have it in your mind that
you want to go back to high
school and cross that stage.
I say, "You can do it!"*

You Can Do It!

I know you have so much potential. Don't be scared of changes. Whatever you want to be, put yourself up to it and challenge yourself. When you put your mind and heart to it, you will succeed.

You have it in your mind that you want to go back to high school and cross that stage. I say, "You can do it!" You told me you want to go to New York for the Culinary Arts Academy Program. I say, "You ca do it!" You told me you want to study restaurant management and business. I say, "You can do it!"

C'mon, you told me your life plan. I know you'll strive for excellence. There are so many things in life you're missing out on because you're locked up. Don't forget your plan when you get home after the group home. Go get the job you wanted at The Beat and go for your diploma. Have fun with your friends, but at the same time, have your head in the right direction. Finish your school and get your education on before anything else. If you're in the right place at the right time, you won't get in trouble. Remember that!

-Baby C, San Francisco

From The Beat: Oh yeah! You can do it! We love this letter to yourself, and we don't think we can add anything to it to make it better. It's as good as it gets. Now go out and do it! (We're waiting to give you that job at The Beat...)

It Could Of Been Me

Last summer I was wit' my bra Mecó and we was thinkin' about how we could get some money. We was hitting hella licks all day but it wasn't fo no real money, it was just like thirty and fifty dollars.

So after we hit a couple of them thangs we got come smackers from my bra and a quarter. We was super on and this ninja was like lets hit a gas station. I knew it was that smaker talkin' so I was ignoring that.

Around 11:00 pm we started really talkin' 'bout hitting a gas station. We was goin' to do it at 1:00 am. We left my bra house at like 12:00 so we was lookin' for a stolo thang, when my sister called me and said my mama went into labor so I hopped on the bus and went to my house so my grandma could take us to the hospital.

The next day I called my bra like what happen last nite and he told me my bra Mecó got hit twice wit a three-five-seven by the store clerk and might be paralyzed and my other bra almost got hit.

I feel like I cheated death 'cause if my sister would have called me two hours later I probably would of got shot too or possibly died. Now my bra in a wheel chair 'cause he wanted to get that fast money. I'm glad I don't live like that anymore.

-Smooth B, Alameda

From The Beat: Sounds like it was a seriously lucky break. As anybody in prison can tell you, even when you think there is no way you're gonna get caught, shhh happens. And, as you point out, drugs make a dumb plan sound great, in the moment. You must think about that night a lot.

A Letter To The New Me

I was a big wanted thief. I could rob cars or anything, and get away with it. I was a pro, a natural. People told me advice, "Don't get in trouble," but I didn't listen. Until one time I got caught and said, "I ain't a pro." I said I got to change my ways, so what I did, I said, "I ain't gonna rob any more. I am going to get a job." I started working and said I actually get more money and I started of fresh.

-Yato, San Francisco

From The Beat: Is this something that has already happened? Did you stop robbing people and get a job? If so, then congratulations for making the decision that will keep paying you dividends into the future. What's your plan for when you walk out of here?

Cheating Death

I find it hard to believe that some one would want to kill me. I don't bang or anything like that. I was walking down the street, and a long side me an old car drove up and I guess they didn't like me because of me skin color, two of them hung out of the window and yelled some gang shhh, and drove around the corner.

I could hear them coming back, but fear had frozen my body. The car whipped around the corner as a rush of adrenaline shot through my body, he had gleaming black object in his hand, by then my mind had gone blank. I saw the muzzle flash of the gun and an explosion of pain in my right leg. I couldn't move or scream, I was helpless. I started to feel light headed, but in my peripheral vision I saw the car jerk into a U-turn and come around for another pass, I tried holding my breath and closing my eyes so that I looked unconscious, but the pain was too much. I relied on my upper body strength to lift myself up, but I failed. The car fired its engine and roared past me, luckily the person who had shot at me missed.

It seemed like forever since help arrived. The bullet had ripped my quadriceps muscle and shattered my bone. I recovered but I'll still always have the scar.

-Gun shot victim, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is horrible. You paint a painful picture. This is no way how anyone should live their life! What are you doing today to live a better and safer life? Do you have a choice in the matter? We say you do!

Saved By My Homeboy

One time that I almost died was in Feb. 2006. Thee incident happened during the day around 4:00 p.m. I was having a good time at the park, just getting bent and chillin'. Me and my homeboy ran out of drink, so we decided to go to the store to get some more. As soon as we walked in the store, I heard six loud pops. All of a sudden, I feel pain on the left side of my neck. I thought I just got sucker punched hella hard, 'cause I felt like one of my teeth was jingling.

As I turn around, I see no one. I spit out what I thought was a tooth. It was actually a bullet. I had just been shot! All of a sudden, I start spitting out blood. I thought that was the end for me.

My homie knew exactly what to do. He applied pressure to my neck. As soon as the police got there, they told my homie to lay me down, that "it was over." But my homie said, "No. He'll choke on his blood." My homeboy stuck wit' me for the whole time until the paramedics got there and the cop started to hit my homeboy. If it wasn't for my homeboy, I wouldn't be alive. If it wasn't for him, I would've died.

-Eight Ball, San Francisco

From The Beat: Man, you barely escaped death. We don't understand why the cop started hitting your homeboy. What happened after that? Since this near-tragedy occurred, have you done any thinking about how you're living your life, and what your life is worth? Have you come to any new conclusions?

My Uncaptured Stories

Hi, my name is Matthew. I was born and raised in California, out of Santa Clara County. I lived with my grandma that was always so loving to me. I was just as you guy's today, confused.

Let me get back to whom I lived with, it was also my brother and sister. My brother was twenty years old. He passed away on the day of March 7, 2007. Now, I recently only have one sister and a nephew that live in the household with me. My brother was killed in a stabbing. He got stabbed by a male and jumped by a female. I still don't know why? I also know that he can never come back.

I am here today letting young people know that no matter the cause, violence isn't the way. Killing someone leads to revenge and payback to other victims, and more killings in the community. We've got to learn how to protect our community by words, instead of danger.

I know that others might think they're all that, but so what! You have to learn that, only god can judge you or able to judge his own people. Forget about the next fools, or as you can call it, haters! They be tripping like words don't hurt, but it does. When I was told that I wouldn't be anything, my childhood was forbidden. I thought that it was true.

I took words so serious and what people said, not knowing. Like stick and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me. I know everyone heard that. But deep down, words do hurt.

I always walked around with doubt about my future. I just knew that I wouldn't be anything. So I let that sink to my head and started acting on those words, to influence me with those negative complications. So I started to do evil ways that pleased me, because that was all I taught myself.

I had manners, but I felt like that way was cool. As everyone knows, whatever's cool we like to do. Doing drugs we thought it was cool. Stealing from our loved ones, or abuse our child. Killing our people and thinking our neighbors are enemies. But not knowing everyone in their own special ways, have a heart of compassion to us.

-Thinking, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Let us first start off by saying we are very sorry to hear about your brother, and our sincerest condolences are with you and your family! To have had such a tragedy happen to someone you were so close to, but yet choose a different way of dealing with that pain, says a lot about you and the love you were raised on. Unfortunately we all go through various hardships during life, and yes, words can have those results on us. Through everything you've been through, it sounds like your head is still on straight and strong! We really appreciate you sharing these very delicate, but truthful stories with us all. And we can only hope that someone reading this can hear your pain, but yet feel your strength.

My Family

My day is full of sadness
 When I'm in my room
 Missing my daughter
 When I used to see her smile
 For her I'll make a change
 When I am with her, I feel happy
 When she gets hungry, I'll tell her mom
 "Make her a bottle and make it snappy"
 Am a watch her grow strong
 Watch her every step,
 Tell her what's right and wrong
 I know her mom and me
 Together every day
 She's gonna see
 I pray to God to look our for them
 While I'm in here, locked up
 I know I'm a get out and be together again
 When I'm apart from them, is like a bad day
 But what matters is that
 Together as a family we'll stay
 I live in the Bay
 All I tell my girlfriend is
 "Don't worry
 Forever I'll stay"

-Father, Marin

From The Beat: You sound like a terrific father. But why did you do whatever, knowing that you were risking being arrested and taken from her? You'll be home soon, but don't forget—you can prepare that bottle and feed your daughter, too.

A Hospital Experience

Damn, 'cause I remember the first time I got stabbed. It wasn't nothing nice for reals. That shhh burn like hell. I end up getting stabbed in my stomach, went to the hospital, went to immediate operation. Woke up the next day feeling lousy! Man, was up in the hospital for a week and a half. I couldn't really walk 'cause my stomach felt like it was gone burst open.

The last day they end up giving me some chicken broth and apple juice. I got 20 staples on my stomach, and it was not lovely. Well, by the time I left the hospital I end up losing 15 pounds... and then got locked up a week after for doin' what I had to do! Tone Kiki out!

-Tone-Kiki, San Francisco

From the Beat: No, you didn't "have to do" what it was you got locked up for; you **CHOSE** to do it. Just keeping it real. Besides your graphic description of your experience (we've had staples following surgery, and we **KNOW** how it hurts), there's something terrible about reading the words "...the first time I got stabbed..." Have there been other times? Will there ever come a time when you value your life (and **ALL** life) enough to do what you really have to do? We sure hope so, before you run out of chances.

Your One And Only Life

Some people don't appreciate life. Life is something special that is given to you once and only once. But people put their life at risk every day by being on the block, chilling with people that got problems with others, and you got nothing to do with it. You could lose you life at any second, so why choose to lose your life for something that's not worth it? Try to live life the way it's supposed to be lived.

-Enano, San Francisco

From The Beat: This piece was too good for us to allow you to spoil it with the last phrase you wrote ("can't stop won't stop") which is not original and which is not true and which undermines the real importance of what you've written here. Forget the nonsense and concentrate on the sense!

Let Me Break Free

I try so hard to break these chains
 I know the wounds of self-caused pain
 Let me break free
 Let me shatter thee and kill insanity
 Unheard lines, wasting time, and poison minds
 Walks, as if belligerent
 Sees only of ignorance
 Fear of difference
 Different races is in groups and don't want ya
 Today's grim reaper wears black hoodies and Filas
 Everybody is killing, and we smoke Newports
 Hotel Rwanda, Darfur Sudan,
 United States, War in Afghanistan
 North Korea communist state
 Bomb the first before it's too late
 It's hard to admit you made a mistake
 Putting money in like slaves and Uncle Sam holdin' the rake
 Damn it Bush send your family to war
 Not my cousin, neighbors and people that's poor.
 My community, everybody acts as if it's not yet hit puberty
 The lights give off static
 No one thinks about logic
 Talk shhh pull out the kator shoot now and ask questions later.
 They spend money on prisons but not school
 But the only people they want to see in jail are fools
 Why people die with now higher homicide
 And my homies still asking me, let's ride
 I'm no criminal
 Sending families to funerals
 It ain't no crime to be on the streets like cross walk lines
 Be on the grind to make money for food
 I'm looking for someone, at the end
 I still ask who?
 I look up to the sky to find no answer
 But rain's coming down on me
 ...got me sick like cancer.

-Lucky, Alameda

From The Beat: Bravo!!! This is a remarkable poem/flow, full of both the hurt and the insight that comes from wide open eyes. But see you do have a choice, because you can choose to go to school and continue to develop your talent. Speak for the people!

A Letter From The New Me

So what's crackin' Beat?

So here you are locked up again Dan! The same shhh! Pushin' yol's, sellin' pills. Now look, got caught up with a fat sack scale and bags. Where did it get you? On a pending case to the pen! So you're here 'til then.

What you goin' to do to set your shhh straight to get above the line?

Stop slangin'! Stop the grind! Cut out the boys. Easier said then done.

This time it's for real, nawmeen! Get that GED. Get wheels and get a job!

So Beat I get out July 11, 2007 to face my trafficking, sale, distribution, and transportation of cocaine as an adult, hopefully they (the court) will see I have changed. 'Til pen hits paper... Gone...

-Rjs

From The Beat: You deliver a tough love letter to yourself! We too want to believe this is your wake up call and the system will cut you a break, but if it doesn't well it's a must you maintain this new outlook wherever you go and continue to teach and work on better yourself. Keep us posted!

Family Betrayal

Hey Beat, this is my first time writing to you guys and since I'm here in my activity and don't even know what the topic is, I picked one to write about, well I wanna say that there ain't anybody you can trust. And when people say family is the only people you can trust, that ain't even true, well in my situation it ain't! I don't trust no one, no matter how much I know them. Not even my mom. Well I'm gonna get to the point at the topic now...

My mom who I thought I could trust, is the reason I'm in here in the first place. She be talking shhh 'bout me behind my back to my PO, telling my PO lies 'bout me that ain't even true.

My mom tells me she misses me, pero, she don't even visit me. And when my PO asked my mother if she thought if I should get out sooner or later, my damn mom said I should stay longer.

If it wasn't for her and her punk boyfriend, I wouldn't even failed EMP and got a new charge of assault and battery. Damn, I hate that broad! And to think I was even close to her while growing up.

Well anyways, another family betrayal in my life is from one of me tias (aunts). I was stayin' with her for a while when I was still on the streets and she always told me I was welcome there and crap, pero, but all she wanted was money out of me. She used my name in the phone bill, cable bill and I don't know for sure what else, and now she can pay those and since she didn't need me she kicked me out.

I was back livin' on the streets again 'cause I couldn't go with me parents 'cause I had just failed EMP and left my mom's pad 'cause her boyfriend.

Another tia betrayed me too. She also told me that I was

always welcome there to her casa too, even if I'm on the run or doing drugs jus' that I couldn't bring them to her house. Well I'm not sure why, pero, she did the same as my other tia and said I couldn't be there no more.

So again I'm on the streets. Well I'm gonna finish this up with one last betrayal from my family that I will never forget or forgive and it's the most screwed up one too.

Well before I ever really became the way I am now, and still was getting along with my mom and everything, we were livin' in a stable home, and everything was all good.

Well one day after a two or three years of domestic violence between my mom and dad, my dad got locked up and since my grandpa had our house under his named, he took advantage of my dad being locked up and threw me and my family out on the streets with nowhere to go. We lived in shelters and with other families for a while and I hated it. I eventually ran away and since then I personally got worse and now have the life I do now.

I honestly think if it wasn't for my screwed up grandpa who had sold our home and ditched out to Mexico with all the money, I wouldn't be the way I am today and would have a better life! Now I am all messed up 'cause of my grandpa!

Well I'm gonna hurry and end this, pero, just know that there is really no one you can really trust! Well not in my life there ain't. Well for those of you who have read this and know you feel the same or similar, family betrayals happened to you, just keep yo' head up homies.

-Knuckles, Santa Clara

-From The Beat: After reading your initial piece to The Beat, oh by the way, welcome, you come on strong full of range and disappointment in the elders who you trusted in. Where did it all go wrong? Could you talk to your family? Is any of this fixable? We are sure there is plenty more to this painful story, but from what you share, it is very disappointing, and we can only hope you have the heart and courage to prove to yourself there is more to your life than being locked up or living on the streets. Knuckle up!

Camp Life

This poem is called Camp Life.

Where the staff teach you about wrong and right.
 Give you new clothes, food, a bed to sleep at night.
 Talking is dead when they cut out the light.

This poem is called camp life.

Wake up first thing is brush your teeth.
 Breakfast time and betta not hear a peep
 Before the staff slap you with a green sheet.
 Hour 4 get a 12 hour day pass.

If you want your overnighter got to be a blue badge.

Red badge get your Fridays to Sundays.

Gold badge get your Fridays to Mondays.

Platinum get all kind of support.

It also looks good when you at court.

The food here look like doo-doo.

It's an insult when they say you look like county food.

If you a worker you get more privileges.

You can eat all the food in the storages.

I'm calling collect please press zero.

If you hit that number you my hero.

3 way my lady you know how that be.

My mom is happy cause I'm off these streets.

My dad is proud cause he's reading The Beat.

My bed is closed 'cause I'm not in the sheets.

My phone is unanswered but people keep calling me.

My absent of home my sister's lonely.

This poem is called Camp Life.

Where you can chill and BS with R.B.

Kick back on game cube with Madden 2003.

Take a vacation without leavin' your spot later.

But you can do that in Mr. Barker's.

You'll get food if you don't be hectic

Student of the week get chow mien in Beckett's.

You'll get green sheet for talking for show.

But do 200 push ups to take it off from Hillymo.

Ms. Price will smash green sheets are handy.

But she love us -- that's why we call her Granny.

This staff will leave you embarrassed

Who will do it better than Harris?

The next man is wise, real old school

His name is Mr. Mecheven but everybody call him Lou.

In the kitchen 7 to 3 is where you will find him

You already know I'm talkin' about Sims.

He's never wrong, he's always right, his beady eyes and make you stand up at night

Talkin' head will have you stand by your bed

The net man pull you to the side, talk to you one on one

To the end always cheerful and full of life

Who also do this, then Mr. Wilkins

"you cool I'm cool, you a fool and I'm a fool!" stand there with a black and red ball

Talkin' is dead when they train off the life

This poem is called Camp Life

Where if you fight you'll go to the Hall.

But you stand there and talk smack looks like you got balls

You bag is dropped and can't go home

You ask to staff can you use the phone

Everybody in role call

Come some dumbass AWOL'd

This poem is called Camp Life

This poem is called Camp Life

This poem is called Camp Life.

-Lucky, Alameda

From The Beat: This poem shows the mind of a true reporter/writer! Instead of just saying you like camp or don't like camp, you break down all the details good and bad: Individual personalities of staff, the relationships that you learn from, the way the food tastes (!!), everything that makes us feel like for a minute we really have a true picture of ...Camp Life.

RIP Ney Ney: It Could Have Been Me

I was with my friend smoking a blunt on the way to school, and I seen a homegirl arguing with her boyfriend

I don't know why they were arguing and she walked away. I started laughing and the next thing I know her boyfriend puss out a shot gun and shoots her. Then shoots her again, she was dead.

I didn't know what to do. Me and my potna ducked behind his car and we heard more shots. Turns out he killed himself too. Rip Ney Ney, we love you .

I guess it could have been me because I was about to go talk shhh t him or fight him for yellin' at her until I heard gunshots.

-Db, Alameda

From The Beat: What a tragic story, all around. This kind of grief and violence must have shaken you up. Did you go to the funeral? How long ago was it? Have you lost other people that were close to you? We're glad you came through.

A Letter To The New Me

Old

Pistol: Say Payne, you a real cool dude. What you do to get to where you are today? To tell you the truth dude, I ain't think you could do it. I mean, damn, you just switched it up on a ninja. You found out things about us I couldn't find inside for nothing. How you find the answers to the questions I had?

Shhh, this is a big one for me. How the hell you understand the things about life I never understood? You know I ain't never been a hater. I ain't got one ounce of that in me. So oh, I gotta say congratulation. Keep doing what you gotta do. Just remember this, I'm gone always be here deep down inside. Holla when you need the soulja to rise.

New

Payne: man let me say I appreciate the comments you made about me. You a cool dude too, brah. I just had to let you go dog. You was too much for a ninja head. What I did to get where I am? I just opened up to new things, ya dig. I'm willing to learn from mistakes rather then follow the same patterns. Shhh, I feel a ninja gotta accept the help provided,. Talking about what you going through helps, dude. You ain't never want to believe that. You don't know how smart we really is dude. You was blind to the fact that you was intelligent.

-P. Crooks, San Francisco

From The Beat: It definitely sounds like the "new" you had his eyes opened and saw in himself something the "old" you had missed — that you are intelligent enough not to want to repeat the mistakes of the past in order to avoid the same consequences in the future. Keep those intelligent eyes open, and keep moving forward!

Jail

We in jail. Would you believe that, jail.

"Remember we thought that was the place for people who were...I don't know the word... "bad." Well, now my mind is changed... shhh, everything changed.

We don't even look the same way we used to. That baby face is gone, and the only thing that matters is the turf, the squad, the money, the girls, the fams, shhh... the rainbow. Last but not least the fam.

Damn, we gone make it.

-Lil Cb, Alameda

From The Beat: This is a sad story about loss of innocence. Like you say, the baby face is gone! But you have gained something else, haven't you? You have gained wisdom — and knowledge about who you are and what you want (and deserve) from life. How will you put this wisdom into practice?

Cheating Death

It was the first day of summer school at Mission High School. School had just let out, and me and my ninjas were walking up the hill to the bus stop. We were waiting for the bus, just talking to each other. The bus came and we boarded it, but it was crowed, so we got off. After we got off, we saw a student pull out a gun that looked like a .22 or .25 automatic.

All of a sudden, everybody started running. When running, I heard three shots. I think it was the second shot that hit me, causing my whole right leg to go numb. After hopping on one leg for about 20 feet, I finally stopped to check if I was hit, first checking on my leg for a bullet hole. I lifted up my pants leg. In doing so I felt a pain in my back so I reached and felt my back, and sure enough, I saw blood. The doctor said it was less than an inch from my spine, but they said I chipped a piece of my vertebrae.

-Maurice, San Francisco

From The Beat: This is a well-written description of a frightening experience. You came so close to being permanently paralyzed, dependent on others for everything from moving, to eating, to cleaning yourself. Did such a close-call make you change anything about the way you live your life? Like what?

Towards A Better Future

My name is Cindy. I was born to a beautiful lady named Cynthia. Years had passed by. My mom had died and I moved to my grandmother's house, and then that did not work out. After a couple of years I had went into the system. I didn't plan on being the way I am now.

I done been to YGC three times. No, I did not plan on coming that once, but I did, and that's a mistake that I have to go through by myself. But it's hard going through the stuff I go through. But as me being me, I just handle it because I'm a strong person.

I see myself ten years from now doing everything I'm supposed to be doing — going to school, having a good job, having my own family and living life the way it is with me and my kids that I don't have yet because I'm not ready yet, and that's that.

-Cindy, San Francisco

From The Beat: There is a lot we admire in this well-written piece, Cindy. We think it shows a lot of maturity and responsibility to realize that you're not ready to have kids yet, so you don't. Good for you! Our question is, do you have some kind of plan to achieve those goals you've set for yourself ten years from now? How do you plan to get from here to there?

A Bad Fight, Cheating Death

It was the night of July 5, 2006. On this particular night, my boyfriend and I had an intense fight. For his own reasons, he was enraged and tried to strangle me numerous times.

The last time he did it, he asked if I wanted to die — and through my cracking voice I told him yes. I turned red and slipped in and out of consciousness.

Luckily, my friend was there. It took him a while to realize my man was for real, but he got him off me. I owe him my life. I honestly wanted to die in his hands that night.

The next morning at school the staff saw the broken blood vessels and investigated. They were going to send me to a psych hospital and arrest him. I warned him and he picked me up and we ran. Unfortunately, I was on house arrest. So, almost a year later from warrants, we're both back in here. In a way, I guess he did take away my life. I'd still gladly protect him because we're madly in love, you see.

-Kitty Cat, Santa Clara

From The Beat: This is such an intense story that has been on our mind since we first heard it. As you wisely say, even though he didn't kill you that night, he certainly ended up taking away your freedom in the long run. Sometimes love causes us to be blind to the dangers around us and makes us want to hurt ourselves. Don't let a fatal attraction be the end of you!

My Angel

What's up? It's me, Lil' One again showing much love and respect to all in here. Well today, I'm about to talk about how I could of died when I was about seven years old.

We were living in Oakland. My mom just got out of prison and my brothers had been getting into a lot of fights with other turfs.

Well, one night about two hours after my mom put me to sleep, there was a drive by. I was in the front room while everybody was in the back, drinking and smoking. When they heard the gunshots they ran to the front and checked on me. I was ok, but there was so much glass everywhere, even sticking in the mattress. So now I believe there was angels protecting me.

Well, that's it for me now. To all in here: keep your head up, stay strong and smile always.

-The Little One, Santa Clara

From The Beat: It certainly does sound like you had a special force over you that night watching out for you. Do you think that angel is still out there protecting you? Perhaps part of the deal is that you have to work on taking care of yourself, too.

Just Rambling On

Hey Beat it's me gain, today I'd like to write about how you look at things.

Incarceration torments so many people, but it doesn't have to. In life, all we can do is to do the best we can with what we have. Though we may be caged bodily by others only we can cage our minds, and only we can set ourselves free. And how do we free our minds?

It is very simple: With a smile. Being locked up is an illusion. Please, don't get sucked into it. Don't bother regretting the past, it's done. The future is later, don't worry about it. These two concepts are also illusion. The only time is right now, don't waste it. You've got to enjoy it, otherwise, what's the point? But there is a problem with mindlessly doing whatever you want; too often we create suffering for each other.

Now, how can everybody be happy if we make each other sad? You've got to be careful what you do; but I've gotten off topic. Heaven and hell can be in the same room, it is just a matter of perspective. Personally, I'd rather be happy.

-Monk, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Nice rambling! How did you learn to set yourself free? How did you come to these conclusions? Now what is the plan to enjoy a life free of incarceration?

What If?

What's up me?

You still good?

Still think the stuff you were doing wasn't wrong?

Still think no one knew what you were doing?

Still think you wouldn't get caught up on locked up?

You keep sayin it was your last sack, you were going to get off.

If you would of stop when you said you would you wouldn't be missin' yo' last high school football season. Now all you can do is receive letters from yo' folks sayin' what colleges they goin' to. Thinking to yo' self it could have been me.

-Cherry bombs, Santa Clara

From The Beat: Oh the regret hurts. We so feel your pain in this letter to yourself. Now we must ask, what's going to cure this sickness and greed that brings you to such a dark place? The road will be hard for you, but not impossible! Sports can still be in your future, it will probably be on a different road, but don't give up, 'cause in the end, if you live right, will feel so good about yourself.

I Could Have Been Chalked

What it do with the Beat Within? Me? Same ole person, just a different personality tryna change, feel me. But it's hella times that I saw a person get killed or shot, and I thought to myself like, "Damn! That could have been me for real." That's why I try to be cool and stay watching my back.

It was times that ninjas got caught with hella drugs and shhh, and I was just with them and had hella shhh on me too, so I thank God every day and pray every night and ask Him to forgive me for my sins. I could have been dead right now if I was out, so all y'all thank God every day because you not promised another day.

-Young Bundy, San Francisco

From The Beat: Well, Young Bundy, we've waited quite a while for you to step up again and show us what you have. It sounds like you're saying that perhaps God is answering your prayers by keeping you safe in here. As for thanking Him for keeping you safe, how do you plan to thank Him through your deeds as well as through your words?

Keep Goin'

Watch out

They comin'

They runnin'

They runnin' real fast

Watch out

They gunnin'

They gainin' on you

Don't stop

Keep runnin'

They shootin' bee stings

Don't stop

Lil' youngin'

Focus where you goin'

Don't stop

They huntin'

Don't let 'em stop you

From yo' future

Or nothing

God forbid evil

They swearing

They cussin'

But you are a pistol

Active and busin'

Don't let em stop you

From yo' future

Fo' nothing

Make 'em go to sleep

Like they sippin' robintussin

You is the real thang

And they just frontin'

Shotty wanna be a thug

Go hard start thuggin'

Since you know you're a pistol

Get active start busin'

But you still runnin'

They comin'

They gunnin'

But God is on yo' side

Like a ship they're sunken

Even though I'm in jail

They not my prosecuter

God is on my side

And he's the executer

Now they can't stop you

Wit' nothing or a computer

'Cause only you decide

The path of yo' future

-Boe, Alameda

From The Beat: What a flow! We bet you read it aloud too. We feel the need to get away, to run while reading your art. So who is the youngin' running from? Break it down for us!

Evil Spirits

Here comes the devil as the spirits rise
 Scared for my life, all I do is cry
 Eyes fire-red it's time to go
 Demons trapped in my body so I put on a show
 Hurting people is a mess
 Taking their soul from their chest
 Laughing as their body turn cold
 Saying out loud I have your soul
 I was told the devil is my best friend
 So ride with him to the very end
 Taking myself out without thinking twice
 Going to the good side just doesn't feel right
 Pleasing myself is what he told me to live for
 Got it here and there but always want more
 Hurting for the devil to be his young soldier
 Now that I take a look at it, my life is over.

- Lil' Mainy The Prince

From The Beat: If you let this evil side win it's over. Your dark poems are deep. We're curious what inspires such darkness? Where's the light, or do you have an attraction to the evil side? Hope it's only in your poetry. You need to use your talents in a productive way too. Give your readers some hope!

Devil's Playground

Killing my dreams before they start
 Taking my heart and ripping it apart
 My spirit is dead but I still walk around
 Not on the earth the devil's playground
 It's real not fake I'm the real ghost writer
 Harming people all day pull all nighter
 Scared for my life but I'll still live
 Am I God's child or the devil's kid
 Running around living life crazy
 I have already been named a demon baby
 One last time I received some mail
 A letter that's saying I'm going to hell
 Laugh at it while I watch it burn
 I'm lost underground the point of no return
 I'm on fire with a hot head too
 Here come the devil what should I do
 We all heard the saying what goes around comes around
 But I'll be back I'm playing on the devil playground.

-Li' Mainy The Prince

From The Beat: Was it a book that attracts you to the devil? Was it a comment someone made to you that stuck? What is it about this fascination with the devil and negativity in your poetry? Well, we're also curious to hear about your life, your upbringing and your dreams when you get out of the group home!

It Could Have Been Me, But It was My Sister

When I was eight years old, me and my little sisters were riding scooters in our old neighborhood in Fullerton, California. When we were riding across the street I was about ten feet in front of her, and when I got across the street I turned around to see where she was, and that's when I saw a car come around the corner, the car ran the stop sign and hit my little sister. The lady that was driving the car was late to pick up her daughter from kindergarten and was speeding. But the good thing was she was in the hospital without any broken bones or internal injuries and she's still alive.

-Kramer

From The Beat: We never know when it's our time, regardless, you and your family were incredibly lucky, given how many pedestrians are killed daily by reckless and careless drivers.

Cheating Death

I remember when I was 11 years old, I was swimming in a lake with my friend Tony, when I stepped off a ledge in the water and fell through, maybe eight feet underwater and was startled and swallowed a lot of water and I sunk. My friend saw me and he helped me out. When I woke up I was inside an ambulance but it wasn't moving anywhere and I got CPR and I just walked home with Tony...

-Tony's friend

From The Beat: Lucky. We are so glad to read you were saved, got the help you needed (CPR) and were able to walk home from the lake. This could have been a very tragic accident, instead quite the opposite.

To My Old Self

I remember my old self. Wasn't that bad, just been a little troublemaker, but always respectful to adults. I have always made mistakes. Well, this is my first time in the hall. Learn a lot from it. Hear some say they not going to be in here after they get out, but they end up in here again. But for me I'll focus on staying away from this place after I leave this horrible place. Being in these walls has made me think hard about how to change.

So to my old self, stop doing what others do, grow up, think straight now. I'm not just talking I will prove it.

-Lam

From The Beat: Good for you in coming to these conclusions. We have faith that you will mature up and do right.

I Just Want To Say I Cheated Death Before

Like two months ago I was in a stole low with my ninja. I come out house they was like, "yo' boy outside."

I was like, "who?"

They said, "Bo!"

I was like, "where my ninja at?"

He had a car I liked

He like, "lets go for a ride! Come on!"

We hopped in the car. He started going hella fast. Shhh he was hitting corners too fast.

I told him to be cool. "5.0 be hot around here. "

He act like he didn't hear me. He kept doing it. Next minute, you know he turned (it was) too late and we hit the pole. Everybody hopped out the car. I was the last person to hop out the car, and when I hopped out the car ran to the sidewalk. When I hit the sidewalk I fell on the ground I couldn't move for about five minutes. When I got up to walk to the house and laid down my body was shaking real fast. I thought I was about to die. I just wanted to thank God for telling me to put my seatbelt on.

-Young Kb

From The Beat: What happened to everyone else? Glad you survived. We also hope this is the last time you get into a car that doesn't belong to you. Wouldn't you hate it if someone took your ride? Of course you would. Plus the car is damaged! Not cool. The time is now for you to take responsibility, or you will in time pay a heavy price.

Learn

I think that when I get out I'm going to do something different with my life. I'm not going to stop banging or nothing, but I'm going to go get a job because I got a strike and going to be on parole when I get out so I got to do something different with my life.

-Vee

From The Beat: If you are not going to stop banging, how the hell can you move on with your life?

I Feel

I feel like I'm fallin' way underground,
 I feel like I'm sinkin' and I'm 'bout to drown,
 I'm goin' underwater and I can't hear a sound,
 I feel like a K-9 locked in a dog pound,
 But I'm a good guy lookin' at my background,
 You won't see nothing bad that'll really make you frown,
 I'm livin on a different turf this ain't my battleground,
 My life goin' in circles like a merry-go-round,
 Year-after-year and year-after-year
 lookin back at my past and it looks dumbfound,
 I used to be a grindin baggin up all pounds,
 Until my bra got shot and then I had to bounce,
 My life goin' past me like a greyhound
 But I gotta catch it while it's all in bound,
 Anything outta bound it ain't my compound,
 Lil' youngster tryna eat still tryna chow down
 Livin off of credit everything on discount
 Got booky money but got no bank account
 But I prayed a couple times I was lost now I found,
 I'm tryna get second chance to turn my life around,
 I was above all things now I'm all underground,
 Lord give me one mo chance on that camp ground.

-Boe

From The Beat: Sounds like you will get that chance, now what will you do with the chance? You know what you want to avoid, we hope you are strong enough to start a new life and not fall prey to your old ways.

I Remember One Day

I was walking down a street and a van came up shooting and I almost got hit, but God saved my life. Then two days later some body else started shooting and my mama was in the way she almost got shot, but my cousin got killed. A month later my other cousin got killed, that's why I changed my life. I stay off the street corner. But I want to know why all that bad luck happen to my family.

-Lil Mike

From The Beat: It's bad all right. We are so sorry for the tragic deaths that have happened in your family. Take a good look at your family and you tell us if they lived a life on the edge, or was it all simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time? Good for you in making change in your life. Take it slow, nothing happens over night!

The New Me

The new me is going to get out and handle business. I plan on living with my father because I think he is the only person that can keep me focused. I'm not saying that my mom can't keep me in check, but the street she lives on is what gets me in trouble and what got me in jail the first time. Sitting in here got me some time to think about what I'm going to do on the outside.

-Handling Business

From The Beat: Not a bad move in moving to a new environment. The only way this will work is you really must not return to the ol' hood.

What I Want in Life

When I get older I want to have a sexy smart wife, and have how many kids that she wants.

I also want to have a good paying job, like being a President of the United States, and live in a big mansion.

-Lil' 9

From the Beat: It's the secret to life - dream big, start small. So what is that first baby step you need to take in order to start making these dreams come true.

I Wonder

I sometimes wonder who I am
 I wonder what my purpose hear on earth is for
 I wonder if I'm doing what I was built for
 I sometimes wonder should I quit gang banging

-Lamarr

From The Beat: You know who you are today, but only the future knows who you will turn out to be. You are young enough, to do plenty more with your life, than being a young foolish gangsta. The choices are yours!

Sleep Sleep

Sleep Sleep away dream about me everyday
 Close your eyes and think hard without no cries
 The results will come to be me
 Sleeping can have you dreaming away deep

Sleep sleep and rest your beautiful, loving mind
 To let you know you're one of a kind
 Drop every thought of stress and just sleep
 And your thoughts would contact me

Sleep sleep my love 'cause I'm sleeping too
 Forget everybody else, you're my boo that's true
 Days and nights I sleep it's you I think of at all times
 Especially sex that's top of the line

Sleep sleep fight for all things that's required to be love
 Show me your prettiness of love no shoves
 Provide sleep to the night so sleep deep
 Let me be the one in your dreams you meet

-Lil' Papa

From The Beat: To sleep is a great and comforting time and place, usually. Hold onto those dreams you have for you love.

Cheating Death On The Mountain

There was a time when I was with a couple of my potnas up a mountain. We use to like to go and smoke all the time up there. And one day we was up there smoking and my friend thought I would have been fun if he drove down the hill fifty-mph. When we was going down he missed the first turn, and we went down a thirty-plus-foot-cliff. When we was going over the cliff I thought it was over, but when we crashed into a river I was surprised that no one was hurt.

-Cesar

From The Beat: Wow! Someone was watching you guys. What came out of this? What did you learn? Are you more careful now? We are grateful you are here to tell the story, and hopefully someone will learn from your friend's foolish act, that could have cost you your life.

It Could Have Been Me In Vietnam

It could have been me on a vacation to Vietnam. Instead, I heard that my cousin took my spot because I ended up in here. Stressing, but slowly calming down and getting used to this daily routine. Still I say it could have been me.

It could have been me walking the stage, accepting a diploma from a high school principal. Instead, I imagine and daydream inside my small room where I'm trapped.

-Pham

From The Beat: One day you will be free and when that day comes you must be prepared to live a life free of the system. You have the tools, do you have the support? What's you plan for the future?

My Broken Nose, A Life Lesson

The first time I went to the hospital is for a broken nose. We where in a stolen car and we where going 100mph on a narrow lane. My homie took a sharp turn and messed up and hit the freeway wall. The cars was all wrecked the windows where cracked, windshield where cracked .The rims were off and the engine steaming a lot. My friends hurt their ribs, another one broke a nose, I did too, and my other friend broke his leg. After this experience I never let anyone drive but me and never stole a car again.

-Izzle

From The Beat: A hard lesson. You're lucky to be alive too.

What I Open My Eyes

When I open my eyes,
It's a new day and new life
Kids play and children fry
When I open my eyes
I see that skies and starlight
Cruel pipes and missing fight
Flat cars and riding bikes
When I open my eyes
It's the something everyday decievin' in a different way
When I open my eyes
More children are being raped
When I open my eyes
Friends is taking my parents' place
Because of drugs or the crack house
Or the bullet stoppin' the heart now
When I open my eyes
I'm at the cemetery lookin' at two or three graves
When I open my eyes
There' no jobs that want to pay or place for my head to lay
When I open my eyes
It's a struggle every day in my life

-Justin

From The Beat: Justin your poetry grows each week. This is a dark vision - a blues lamenting the struggles you go through. Yet you keep reaching for the pen instead of giving up - and that part of you sees something, something that gives you hope and the strength to keep striving. What is it that you see?

It's Not My Time

On April 11, 2007 I had run away from home with my ninja Raul and his girlfriend Adriana. I was drinking two big bottles of Henn. We went for a walk, so I said I want to go get my girl in Daly City. I hadn't seen her for like three weeks. I love her with all my heart, that's the one for me. Her name's Michelle. So I stole a car and looked inside. I found wine.

So I was on my way to Daly City and I was drinking by the time I was on the Bay Bridge. I was already drunk when I pushed the car to 100 and looked at my ninja. When I looked back to the front, there was a Pepsi truck. Everything went so slow. When I hit the brakes, smoke was rising from the tires, -that's all I remember.

Then I woke up in the hospital. My ninja can't walk now, the girl broke parts all over her body, me: scars in my forehead and in my hand. I thank God every day because that day wasn't the day for me.

-Bones

From The Beat: That sounds like a very tragic day for all three of you that were in the car. How about the truck driver? Was he or she hurt? Hopefully you will treat this experience as a wake-up call and take a hard look at how you use alcohol.

Setting Myself Up And Cheating Death

Me and my potna was standing outside one night. Some Mexican guy came out of the store where we was at and ask if we knew who had some weed, so I turned around and asked my potna if he knew. My potna was about to get him, so ma potna said yeah, he got some. He asked Mexican what he had. He said he had \$20, so then my potna told him to walk down the street.

My potna got some news paper and put hella leaves in it and crumbled it up. He gave it to dude. Me and ma potna ran and hopped a fence. Dude hopped in his van and went around the corner and parked. When we thought it was cool to come back out we went back to the corner, I turned around and seen dude comin' up the block wit' an umbrella. So I told my potna that we just have to get on him, but then as he got closer he had a long shotgun in his sleeve so me and my potna bounced on him.

Me and my potna ran down the street and went through somebody's backyard. We both thinkin' that he right behind us. Why me and my potna ran from the side of the house right into dude. My potna started running toward one street, and I start runnin' up another, then as I got to the other side of the street my potna start runnin' up the same street I was goin' up. My potna was runnin' up the sidewalk and I was in the street runnin', the Mexican guy got to the corner and let off several shots. Me and my potna runnin' so fast that my potna thought I got hit, but the whole time I was on the side of him. And that was the last time I got close to death.

-Rob

From The Beat: Wow! What a chase. Hopefully you learned a lesson about ripping somebody off and doing dirt.

A Letter to the Old Me Until the New Me

"A Blood, a cuz, a dog". Men get yo head straight and stay on that right path. Because that left path and that choochootrail ain't what it do. Then my mind say, "who u talkin' to?" "A Blood, a cuz, a dog." But really tryin' to become that young man that my mind was really talkin' to. Not that. A Blood, a cuz, a dog, that's what my negatives lead me to. But the more courage, and the more my mind tries to get me on that right path, what I call positive, that negative path stays tryin' to keep me from being a young man. It's callin' me "A Blood, a cuz, a dog"... "come to that left field, I'm tellin' you it's that real deal". But my rights always says that's that Holy field. Ain't nothin' Holier that that right field.

-Keith

From The Beat: You have given us Beat readers a lot to think about in your piece. It's a conversation, an internal struggle. We like how you repeat the names that people call themselves and one another. These names start to sink in and define a person, right? It's important to have a conversation with ourselves that guides us and pushes us to be who we want to be on the outside. In your piece, when you talk about the struggles between the two paths, you're telling us: "trust your instincts".

Car Accident

How I cheated death one time was I got in a car accident but I survived but it wasn't good for my patna because he was drivin and he didn't have no seat belt on so he broke his nose and I wanted to drive so bad but I didn't an I'm glad I did because knowing me I would of been drivin way faster than that and I could crash way faster and harder but thank God I didn't.

-Lil' Paul

From The Beat: Remember these days friends don't let friends drive without seatbelts on.

I Want To Make It...

I want to make it in life.
Be somebody,
not a criminal.

Have a good house and a family with you
I want to make it with you.

Never leave you alone or my responsibilities.

Sorry for this mistake I made mija.

I plan on making you happy for the rest of your life.

I want to make it out of here and start anew and be with
you

because I love everything that is you.

I want to make it...

-Eric

From The Beat: You will!! What's is your plan in finding happiness and staying free?

Dear Kyle

Hey whats up Kyle. I know everything about you and I would like to say that you lived a good life so far. I know that you is not perfect but I do know that your blessed and you have a good family that take good care of you and that loves you.

All you really need to do is work on your mouth and how you talk to people. I hope you learned your mistake and never go back to jail. You get good grades so keep it up and you can go to a real good college and be something in this world.

Keep your head up and try not to think about how long you got just do your time and get out and be thankful that you got to live to see another day.

-Kyle

From the Beat: Great letter! We hope you keep a copy of it so you can remember all the strength you were ready to share with your future self... hear that encouragement!

Crowd Shooting

My name is Beezo and I almost died a few times.

One of the times, I was with the wrong people at the wrong time, and somebody start to shoot at the crowd.

I start running and five minutes later, I felt something breaking in my ankle and next thing you know I buckle to the ground. When I seen my ankle and seen that I was hit, I passed out and when I woke I was in the hospital with my momma and sisters over me crying.

-Lil' Beezo

From The Beat: Some people say that their life flashes before their eyes in this situation. Did that happen to you? Which was worse, getting shot, or seeing your family frightened and crying in the hospital? We are glad that you lived to tell your tale, and hopefully also to learn from it and avoid dangerous situations in your life.

Tryin' To Get Myself Together

What's good BeatThings have changed for me since I been out in The Hall I'm at camp tryna go home and live a good life. I be going home this week for 12 hours, after spending three months locked up away from my family.

I been through a lot, tryna get myself together after the judge blame some crimes that I didn't do and just looked at me and thinks I don't need to be with my family.

But yeah that's all Beat. One love Beat, I'm out till next time.

-Lil' B

From The Beat: You'll be back with your family soon.. in the meantime, what kinds of plans are you making to make sure you live a good life? What habits are you changing?

It Could Have Been Me

Before I came here this time I was charged with first-degree burglary. It was me and my other seven patnas. We came up like \$500,000 and feel me we got greedy and tried to come up with some more.

We hit another house and when we came out the house hopped in the car when we saw choppers and police cars everywhere. I was in the backseat and kept on sayin "drive."

We was in a high speed chase. When we stopped I ran. I got caught though everybody did. Six of us was juveniles so we went to the hall. Two of them went to Santa Rita. One of them snitched so my patna is going to spend like eight years in the pen. Good thing I wasn't 18 'cause I'll probably ended up like him. I went to a group home for that. They terminated me so I'm going to L.A. I'm glad I didn't go to the pen. It could've been me though.

-L

From The Beat: Getting greedy is often when you get caught. You will be 18 soon. Do you think you can avoid the temptation of greed and stay away from robbery? As soon as you turn 18, the consequences of getting in trouble are going to be life-changingly, devastatingly huge. Even though L.A. might be tough, treat it as a new chance at life. Now is a good chance to make a clean break with the past.

June Seventh

That's when ma brother died, and I think it should of been me. My big brother always took care of me and didn't let no ninja get outta pocket wit' me. Now I have to stand on my own two feet. It don't feel right 'cause I never had to worry about nothing. He took care of my problems. Now I got to take care of my own.

-Gaeland

From The Beat: Losing a brother or sister, especially one who takes care of us and looks out for us, is a devastating loss. Is there someone you can talk with about your feelings of sadness and guilt after losing your brother? Why do you think it "should have been you"?

Close Call

Well I am going to write a time when I whas with my friends chilling at the block and it was about 2:00 AM and 3 cars passed by. We all noticed that and we left to go pick up my friend. When we came back we seen a lot of people out of there house and they told us a guy got shot where we were at.

I told my friend's that that could have been us ...well, that's all I got to say.

-Edgar

From the Beat: We just read that most of the homicides in the East Bay lately take place after dark. Do you think that young people would be in less danger if they stayed off the streets at night?

Me and My Girl

Well yeah, it's me, Deary. It's Tuesday, June 26, 2007 Well, last week I wrote that I didn't know my girl was pregnant. Well, yesterday I found out that she was, and we decided we gonna keep it. But we don't know how we gonna tell her parents. But we will have to tell them sooner or later.

But I'm not that worried because I get out in two and a half months, so I'll be able to take care of my girl and the baby. Well I hope that I'll do better in my life. Hope things will turn out better.

Peace

-Deary

From The Beat: Whoah, Deary, that's big news! Fatherhood is huge! Have you told your own family yet? And how did her parents react?

Hospital Times

On Feb. 1, I was in Saint Rose Hospital for a bleeding ulcer in my stomach. I was hospitalized for a week because at first they didn't know what was wrong with me then they found out. The way they found out was by me waking up exactly a week before my birthday in the hospital in a puddle of all my blood. There was at least six doctors in my room trying to help me, afterwards they told me if I would have took any longer I would of died! So to this day, I thank God for every day I wake up to be able to see my mom and sister. This is my hospital experience.

-Kyle

From The Beat: It sounds like that painful experience made you appreciate your loved ones. Maybe this is what that old saying means... "God works in mysterious ways".

A Hospital Experience

Man, my hospital experience was when me and my brother got shot on the same night. Man, that is not a good feeling. That shhh ain't coo'. I got shot in my leg and my brother got shot in his back, leg and chest. Man, I knew that I was coo', but was my big bra coo'? Man, I was ready to do whatever it took to keep my big bra in this world even though he was still alive and that was my hospital experience. I love you big bra.

-Lil' Bk

From The Beat: We are so glad that both you and your big brother survived these shootings. If you really are serious about wanting to do whatever it takes to keep you and him safe, you will avoid dangerous situations, including any and all gang activity. Do you think this is possible?

A Couple Scars And A Story to Tell

I could of died about 5 times. I've had a gun pulled on me. I've been shot at. I've been stabbed by a screw driver. I've been in an almost fatal car crash. My friends I almost fell off a cliff into some water. But we swerved back onto the road at the last minute.

But one part in particular I really almost died. I was 3 years old living in Haward. These older kids stole my ball so I chased them across the street.Next I know I wake up in the hospital a week or so later.

I was hit square in the chin by this old lady at 45 mph. I flew 150 ft 15 ft in the air. I've should of died the doctor said. Luckily all I got was a couple scars and story to tell.

-Lil' Mainey

From the Beat: Wow, Lil' Mainey. Thanks for sharing all these hairbreadth escapes. You know, some of these dangers you can't control... but others are because of how you live your life,.... It's almost like you don't treat your life as if it's the most valuable thing you have. Why is that?

I'm No Longer A Little Girl

Where I stood yesterday, and where I stand now, are two different places and I made it somehow. Yesterday was confusing, I was lost and lonely. In the world today I have guidance -- I'm no longer a little girl.

My mind is focused, my heart is free. My goal is simple. I know exactly who I want to be. I want to be a strong woman, independent and wise, I want to be me, and take off this disguise. A disguise you gave me, a disguise that will fall, I will take it off completely -- for I don't want it anymore.

-Me

From The Beat: Awesome! So tell us more about how this strong woman, independent and wise, will deal with life's challenges. What will she do when Mr. Wrong comes 'round? What will she do when she feels hated on? What will she do when she meets a challenge?

Shot Several Times

Despite my Beat name I've cheated death more the a few times been shot three times and sliced a couple times. When I was 15 I was in wit' ma bra and some Ninjas I was funk' wit' came by shootin' and I got shot in the knee and the shoulder.

It could have been my head, so I feel I cheated death.

-The Truly Innocent Man

From the Beat: Did that feel like a wake-up call to you, did it make you want to change your life? Did you feel like you'd been given a second chance?

This Ain't Cool

A letter to the new me is how I was before I got sent to camp, before I got sent here all I was about is getting' money the fast way, me and the people and me I be with. I admit it was good while it lasted. I got everything I wanted

But now after six months at camp, I don't think it will happen this way I want to get out and get a job and be solid 'cause this jail shhh ain't coo'.

-Lonnie

From The Beat: We hope that new you writes to The Beat to let us know what it's like out there, and how things are the second time around. But Lonnie, what will you replace the old habits with? What kind of job? Will you join a program, reach out to a mentor?

The Game

Lost in the game

Now I'm down and the streets remain

Everybody movin' on one

While I'm down thinking bout I should have done

Hitting clicks

Look for only fast ways to get it quick

Out on the streets doing the foo!

Instead of going to school

Now I have a lesson learned

Don't just take the next ninjas word

'Cause that can get you and some other's hurt

I seen things from good to better to worse

Seventeen gone

Pretty soon I feel like I'm standing alone

I turned fourteen that's when I seen those shady things

Sitting in front of the sto'

Every morning they rode up and right in front of

Me, kill Rico

I feel a change

But I need to get out of a range

I can't go too far

'Cause I do I feel like I can't survive and I'm gonna starve

Some people feel like they can't leave

But some smirky and feel like they can't do nothing

but thief

Some scared to leave the Bay

Bet they gone get stuck

But so what

Till time for this ninja to cut

And start looking forward to big face bucks.

-Domo

From The Beat: You have more to look forward to. You have education, college, travel, an interesting job... and legit money. Legit money is money you don't have to be afraid of losing, money that doesn't bring 5-0 on you, money that doesn't add to your stress. But how are you going to reach these things, Domo? What's your plan?

What I Would Say to the New Me

I would say Antonio, you need to be cool and get a job man. You don't wanna be like a yo' o.g. patnas and be on the corner at 30.

You should be good and take care of yo' family and be with yo' girl and take care yo grandmother and yo mother. Dats all I got peace beat.

-Lil' Antonio

From the Beat: We'd add this too: Lil Antonio, remember that you have a great purpose in life. You could be a leader, a teacher, an inspiration. Make sure that you are always searching for your purpose, and once you find it, be true to it!

Pain

I have all this pain inside. Everyday I find out more and more about myself, I find myself finding links to my past and am beginning to see direction for my future. A little pain trickles away with every word I write, every word I speak or don't speak or don't speak , and every tear I cry.

Sometimes it scares me how much has already been lifted off my shoulder's in these last five months even though this new feeling feels good it is just so new for me.

found out I am not just made up of hate and pain, but of a whole bunch of feelings like love and hurt -- and even happiness.

-Me

From The Beat: You are taking brave steps. Most people are afraid to really look into themselves, and their past, because it's so much easier to live in denial. But as you know, the rewards are great, because like you said, you discovered your capacity for love and happiness. What's next?

Could Have Been Me

I was walking down the street from the BART Station and some guy yells to an Asian guy, "ef you!" The guy starts to advance toward the Asian dude and out of nowhere, the Asian pulls out a taser gun on the hostile, yelling dude. I wondered if that could have been me, messing with people, and he could of tried to tazer me out of self-defense or something. But I'm glad it wasn't me.

-Deandre

From The Beat: We hope this experience changed your mind about messing with people.

To Me

Dear Damn Self,

What happened. I'm not saying everything is bad now but this aint what we had planned. In elementary school, we had plans. We was gon' go to High School and be something to make mama smile and stuff.

Man real talk though you wouldn't make it. We changed 2 much, it ain't too late too bounce back though. I'm just saying being where we at wasn't a part of the plan. We went from straight A's to F's and F's highest in class to 187.

Forget it we just stop going to school all together. We went from doing school projects to selling drugs.

They got us locked up but you gotta set us free...I give up!!

-Lil Cb

From The Beat: Like you said, it's not too late. You had big dreams, and you still have big dreams. Real plans, real intelligence, real motivation. Unfortunately, we can't set you free, but you can set yourself free...Do not give up!

Bus Violence

One day me and my brother was on the bus. Out of nowhere somebody shot at it. I almost got shot in the head until my brother told me to get down because he saw it coming. Then the boy that the shooter was trying hit got off the bus and ran, then the police came .

-Troy

From The Beat: This is not the way to live, but it's our sad reality. Frightening that there is way too many careless people on the streets with easy access to guns.

Stop Following

If I could change myself I would change the time I first went to the hall or when I could have walked away from my friends and let them do the robbery, but instead I did it with them.

I could have also said no when my friends offered me to smoke but I didn't so that is what I would change if I could

-Derrick

From The Beat: That would be a big step for you or anyone who is caught up in doing what the friends do. Time is now to be your own person. Make better choices that benefit you and not hurt you and others.

I'm Sorry

Hi Beat. Ever since I been locked up I've been scared of these inmates that want my head. Lately I cry myself to sleep thinking Y I touch that girl She was playing with my long dreads and we fell in love. And we didn't know her mom was home.

So she thinks I was doing something but I'm sorry and wish to take everything back.

-Young T-Face

From The Beat: Remember that the system only sent you to camp - not CYA, which means that you are going to get a second chance to be happy and safe with your family after you get out of here. In the meantime, are you doing the programs at camp that might make the time go faster?

Proud of the New Me

I want to write to myself, and tell myself I'm "proud" I love the new me.

Why? Because the new me thinks way more smarter and wants me to get the things I desire.

The new me wants nothing more than and respect from others. The "new me" is lovely. I love it.

Only thing I need is money and a loyal family. I love the new me, it's real solid and a little twisted .

-Doogie Baby

From The Beat: Sounds like the new me is similar to the old me... you were always a good person, a smart person, you just made a lot of bad decisions. The question is - can you make sure that the "twisted" part of you doesn't pull you back in the wrong direction?

Random Shooting

One day me and my folks was walking to the hood, when so and so bust at us with a baby nine and shot my cousin in his head and I was right next to him.

-Baby Erin

From The Beat: Oh we're so sorry what you experienced. We send our respects to your cousin.

Before I Could Swim

A long time ago before I knew how to swim, I was at Martin Luther King, Jr swimming pool. I was in da three feet with my lil' cousin, and my other cousin was swimming in da ten feet. My lil' cousin said if he go, I go. I'm like, "All right." He went and passed it, and then I try to do it and almost drown. It took me two weeks to figure it out how to do it, but now I know how. Anybody can die if God want you to, but obviously it wasn't my time.

-Semoore

From The Beat: We're not sure if we got your name right 'cause you wrote it so fast we couldn't read it. If people only die when it's "their time," then why do you think it's "their time" for so many young men of color? Do you think God prefers to let rich white people live, but take the lives of poor black and brown people?

A Hospital Experience

When I was about seven, I had a bad hospital experience. My tonsils were swoll, and I had to get them taken out. So I went to the hospital to get them out. When I got them taken out, I almost died. I kept throwing up blood! After they stopped the bleeding, they asked my mom is she wanted to keep me overnight 'cause the bleeding might start again, and she said yeah. Good thing she did, 'cause it started bleeding again and I almost died that night. So I thank God 'cause my mom prayed for me that night. I don't believe in cheating death, because people are going to die when their time comes.

-Kizzer One

From The Beat: We're glad you survived this scary experience. We're curious, though, about that last line. If "people are going to die when their time comes," then what's the point of praying for someone to live? If it was your time (according to you), then all the prayers in the world wouldn't change a thing. Are we missing something?

Cheating Death

I remember when I would be on the block doin' what I do, and some ninjas that I was beefin' wit' slide through and start knockin' at me. I don't know how I didn't get hit. Either God was on my side, or they didn't have no aim. The whole time I didn't have a thang but my folks had one and start knockin' back and they both almost hit me. After I knew I was coo' and I wasn't hit, dat change the way I moved in da 'hood. I start beastin' and be on shhh.

-Shoemaker

From The Beat: So let's get this straight — you almost got shot both by your enemies and by your friends, and still you're out there doing what you do. Some people, apparently, need to lose their fingers in the fire before they learn that it burns.

Hear Me

I hear you, you hear me
I see you, you see me
Man, it ain't ma fault
You got locked up for trying be me
You feel me, I feel you
You help me, I help you
Bra, step yo' game up when shoot them dice
It ain't ma fault we got into that fight
You cheat, I cheat
You beef, I beef
The day I seen you in the casket
It felt like hell rained on me

-M Ron

From The Beat: Part of what makes this poem so powerful is that it is so mysterious. We wish you would write a piece that explains this tragic situation at the heart of your poem so we could all understand.

Blind And Deaf

I cheated death once when I overdosed on triple c's. I went blind and deaf and felt like I was about to die.

-Mark One

From The Beat: This is almost too short to publish. (If this is all you can give us in a one-hour workshop, then you may want to consider changing your name to Lazy One...) All we have to say about this is, if you are still doing drugs after this experience, then you are still blind and deaf!

Be Real, Not Fake

There are people that say they got your back, but they really are not about shhh. They will smile in your face, and this and that, but in the long run, they will stab you in the back. Why is it so hard for people to keep it real, be there yourself, and do what need to do and not what you think you want to do.

People have to open your eyes and see the real shhh that is going on today. You have to get with the program and be you. People come to the hall and talk all this shhh, about the time they can do and the crime they did. But they do not know shhh. They do not know the law. Ninjas need to step their own game up, and do you, not other people.

-Fat Rat

From The Beat: You're complaining about people who come to the hall and talk about other people. But in this piece, you are also talking about other people. Tell us something about yourself. What are you doing to "get with the program" and "be you?"

Caught By Police In Honduras

I remember getting out of a party. It was late and I couldn't be out, but I was still out, and police officers their don't like that. When I was getting out the party, I saw some police officers and I started running away. Then they started chasing me and they was shooting at me hella times because police there do that. But then they caught me and they arrested me for two days, and they let me go, and that is how close I was from death.

-Tontin

From The Beat: This is a scary memory, Tontin. Have you lost friends to the Honduran police shooting at them? Are things with the police better here or there? How long have you been in the U.S.? Your English is very good and you write well, so we know you could do anything you set your mind to. What have you set your mind to?

Missin' My Poohbear

I'm missin' my Poohbear every day that pass because I know sooner or later I'ma get out to be there for her and take care of her. Now, all I do is think of the things I could've been doing if I was at home with my Poohbear, and how I could've stopped my lil' sis from beating that girls ass. I miss you and I love you girl, and you know it's true.

My freedom is in the air and they're gonna let me out soon, so I could be with you Poohbear. So don't cry. Just wipe them tears from your eyes because I'ma be with you sooner or later and it's all gonna be all right. Keep your head up and don't let nobody put you down because sooner or later your baby Grumpy is gonna be out. Much love, Mija.

-Grumpy

From The Beat: It's good to have someone you love so much waiting for you. But what we wish you had included in this piece is not just that you will soon be together again, but what you're going to do (and what you're going to stop doing) that will allow you to stay together. Any ideas about that?

Cheating Death

I remember when I thought it was all over is when me and two other people were coming from this party and it was kinda late. It was like around 12:30 at night. We were walking down this hill and we saw a gray van. The van stopped right in the middle of the street while we were in the middle of the hill. We heard them say, "There them ninjas. Go get them ninjas!"

Right then I thought it was over. They slid the slid door open I saw like three guns pull out, plus the gun from the passenger window. The people in van started shooting at us. I was very shocked at first. I just stood there because I didn't believe it.

Then I started running.

One of the people got shot, and a bullet grazed my knee cap. I thought I was shot, but I was grazed. I went to see my patna. He was shot two times.

Well words are getting short.

-Young Guez

From The Beat: did this near-death experience make you want stop doing any of the things that put your life at risk? If not, how many chances do you think you have? Is it possible that God was trying to warn you — a kind of prayer to you to take your life and your future more seriously? If so, did you hear His prayer?

My Back Yard

I come from the sickest 'hood
You can find me in the front page of the book
Gotta be the best in e'rything I do
You know I'm gangsta, fool
Don't fall in love, so I ain't got no boo
Always cut school
Let ninjas talk shhh like it's cool
But in time, they gone pay their dues
My back yard is a zoo
Foo's runnin' loose

-Lil' Lazy

From The Beat: You seem so proud of the things that have led your freedom to be stripped from you, proud that you've turned yourself into a number in a system that doesn't care much about you, proud that you are living in a cage surrounded only by other boys, proud that a bunch of strangers tell you when to sleep, when to get up, when to go to the bathroom, when to speak and when to be silent. Ah, yes, you have a lot to be proud of!

Could Have Been Me

Man, I done been through it all. People think they know, but they really don't know. They think that just because they older than us, they know what we goin' through. In reality, they don't know what they talkin' 'bout. They tell you they went through racism and shhh, but that ain't got nothin' on what we goin' through.

Shhh, I got hit. My squad got hit, and my big bra just got hit five times while I was in here. And I think I would have been with him if I was out. It would have been both of us, and I wish it was because I die for bra 'cause he showed he will die for me. We been rockin' since I jumped off da porch, and we go rock till da casket drop. And dat's off top, or till da warden take da key out do lock.

-Poon-G

From The Beat: Y'all just keep doing what the white men who run this country want you to do. You keep killing each other and keeping each other down, while those at the top sit back and smile in self-satisfaction. The tragedy of still being a child not yet able or willing to think and be responsible is that by the time that warden does control your every move, you will probably have grown up enough to see how foolish and self-defeating your choices were, but by then, it will be too late. Of course you don't think we're right about that, but only because you're still not thinking.

Mothers Cry

Bullets fly people die
As many go, mothers cry
Why do people beef
How come homeless people don't eat
What you jump into, you get shot back out
As mother pray child he end up getting shot from a kay
So in the end, stay out the way before you get sprayed

-Jabba

From The Beat: What a sad description of what goes on in the streets! Are you contributing to the beef, or to the peace?

I'm Gonna Prove Them Wrong

Last year I seen my cousin graduating from Thurgood Marshall High School, and I thought to myself that could have been me. Watching my cousin do good just makes me want to get my shhh together and stop coming here. Thinking that could have been me makes me think how good I want to start doing. When I do graduate through that stage, I'm go prove everybody wrong. All the people who said I wouldn't make it are going to be wrong.

-Joe Dirt

From The Beat: Well, we hope you follow through on this promise to stop coming here and to graduate high school. You don't have to prove anything to anybody — but yourself. It's your life and your future that you're preparing for, so do it for you!

The Letter Of The Old Me

The old me told me to cut school. Now the old me told the new me to go to school and not be late. The old me always told me not to go home. Now I'm locked up, the old me told my new me go home on time and follow the court order.

-Tommy

From The Beat: So, who will be walking out of here, the "old" you or the "new" you?

It Could Have Been Me

I heard gun shots. It sound like something fat that I heard. I pull out my banga, run to the corner to see what those shots was. I see someone running behind me. I was finna blam him 'cause I didn't know who he was, and I heard gun shots seconds before, feel me. So how do I suppose to react?

Anyway, after I get a closer look at the person behind me, I realize that the person was my cousin and that he had been shot five times, and when I saw him he was bleeding everywhere. His face was hanging because he been shot in his face. I grabbed him and hold him and screamed for help.

Nobody seemed to hear me, so me and my gunnas rushed him to the hospital. I am just saying that could have been me because I'm always with him. But for some reason I was not with him at that time. So that why I feel it could've been me.

-Top Boy Torrells

From The Beat: Your reasoning about taking shots at someone you don't know sounds exactly like what the police say when they shoot unarmed people in a chase. They always justify it by saying they thought they were in danger. So, what makes your justification different from those cops? What if you had actually opened up and you killed your own cousin! Two lives and your entire family would have been destroyed. Would that have been worth the game you keep playing with your own lives and the lives of others? When will this game end? Until it does (or at least, until you stop playing), it not only could have been you, it still could be you!

It Could Have Been Me

Hey Beat, what's up? This Yato. I'm locked up and I look out and I see a man walking by eating a fat lil' burger, and I say, "Man, that could have been me." So I realize I got to keep out so I can have me a burger at my house.

I'm in Juvenile Hall. I haven't ate a burger in two months, so a burger would be so good.

-Yato

From The Beat: If the thought of eating a burger keeps you from doing the things that put you behind these walls, then let's hear it for the burger! Next time you're tempted to do those things, just think about the food you won't be getting...

To The New Me

Dear Extinguisher, aka Lo. The new me ready to be a part of the world, my world, San Francisco. See, the old me was too grimy, a drug dealing, I-pod snatching, laptop lick-ing dude. Now I'm a changed man. I'm helpful, smart, move making. You know, all that good shit!

-Lo

From The Beat: No, we don't know. Tell us what "all that good shhh" means to you. And, more important, how did you make the change from the snatch man to decent man?

Coming Close To Death

One time, me and bra bra where coming back from the store. We were going to his house when a car pulled up. A ninja hopped out and started knockin' off shells. I ran, but ma bra got hit in the head, stomach, the part by the top of the thigh.

When I turned around to see if he was behind me, he wasn't, so I got back to where we was. I seen hella people saying he got shot. I seen his brains through his beanie, blood comin' out and all the shhh. So that's what happen.

-Young Weez

From The Beat: Did he die? Did being so close to getting shot yourself make you think, "It's time for a change?" Can you imagine your life if you had taken a bullet to the spine and ended up in a wheelchair unable to walk, to feed yourself, to enjoy a sexual relationship, to keep yourself clean? Something to think about...

Cheating Death

I remember I almost got killed on the block. We was posted on the block and some cats came though in a van with two sliding doors open and they started letting off.

-Deshawn

From The Beat: You're going to have to give us more details and more of your thinking about events like this if you want us to publish what you write. Two sentences in a one-hour workshop is the lazy man's way out. Give us the details. Did this event make you want to change anything in your life? Why were they shooting at you? How does it feel to have enemies whose names and faces you don't even know?

Dear Me

I'm starting all over again. Being in here, I've done a lot, a lot of thinking. I'm fo' real this time going to change, with no doubt in my mind. No gang shhh. I'm be a nurse practitioner for newborns.

-Stephanie

From The Beat: First, we admire your strong statements about changing for real, and we admire your desire to be a nurse practitioner. But second, by writing about three topics instead of just one, you cheat us out of more of your thinking. Plus, the other two aren't even going to be published because they're each only one sentence long, and you can't teach us anything in one sentence. Next time, please choose only one topic, and write a lot more about it. For example, in this piece, you could have included your plan, step-by-step, for achieving your goal.

Rest In Paradise

'S'up wit' chu, Beat? It's my first time writin'. so I would just want to get some shhh off my chest.

First, I would say I was hurt when my homie died. It was hard to go through this stuff, but I'm getting' over it. My homeboy Doja got shot a couple of times. I was locked up when I found out, so all I would say 'bout that is I wish it was me and not him.

All I got to say is Rest In Paradise homeboy. You will never be forgottin'. Much love.

-Grande

From The Beat: We're glad to have you writing for the first time in The Beat, Grande, and we're very sorry about Doja. Even though you wish it was you and not him, it didn't turn out that way. You are alive and have a life. What do you plan to do with it?

This Time I Mean It!

Sometimes I think I should change, and people tell me I should. When I first came to the halls, I said that I wasn't coming back. But I'm back.

Now I'm going to change. I'm gone follow the rules for probation, learn how to control my anger, and to not do bad things.

-Coo' B

From The Beat: We hate to read those words, "I'm back." Following all of probation's rules is not so easy, but it is a hard choice you have to make, if you don't want to write another piece in The Beat with the words "I'm back" in it.

I Want To Go Home

I want to go home 'cause I miss my family. I want to go home 'cause I miss picking on my little brother. I want to go home 'cause I miss getting yelled at. I want to go home.

-Chunky

From The Beat: You have a gift, Chunky, for putting together a series of thoughts that paint us a picture. Your reasons for wanting to go home (including picking on your little brother) are so real that we truly feel them. We hope you go home soon.

It Could Have Been Me

One day I was rushing my friend to come pick me and my homegirls up so we could kick it, and he ended up getting in an accident on his way to pick up us up! I was just thinking to myself, "Damn! That could have been me in that car and getting in that accident!"

Thank God he wasn't hurt as bad as the accident looked or as bad as the car was wrecked!

-Samantha

From The Beat: Was he driving too fast or under the influence when he had the accident? We're happy he wasn't seriously hurt, but we wonder if this close-call has made any difference to how you drive, or any other aspect of your life.

It Could Have Been Me

My big homie was on a dirt bike taking my friend to school, and the police try to get on them. They ran dem and a car came out the cuts and hit dem off the bike, and I feel like that could have been me.

-Raymond

From The Beat: Yes, it could have been you, and it still could be you if you're doing the kinds of things that cause the police to chase you. Next time, give us the details. This is really too short to publish. For example, why were the police chasing your friends? As for you, it's time to grow up.

If I Go

If I go today then forget it. My squad gon rock. I'm livin' for right now, not tomorrow, a real soljia from head to toe cousin, neva a sucka or a snitch.

God got my back it's all in His hands. I pray every night. That don't mean I'ma stay alive. I try, but its crazy. I can't let 'em down, but they can't get me out of here. Only God could let me go and put my life on da right track.

-Goo B

From The Beat: We're not impressed with your trust that God has your back. In fact, we don't think god means much to you at all, certainly not as much as your squad does. You can't break every one of God's rules and then claim He has your back. You pray every night, but not to do God's will, but to be safe doing your own will! The truth is, your actions, and not your words, prove that you don't respect God, and that has unfortunate consequences, some of which you're living right now. Only you can put yourself on the right track, and if you choose not to, you're saying something to God.

It Could Have Been Me

A time when I cheated death is when I was at a party wit' some of ma homeboys and I was chillin' downstairs rollin' a blunt until when I heard some drama up stairs. So, when I was done rollin' a blunt, I seen ma ninja telling some other people to come outside so we can throw 'em.

When I went outside to talk to ma ninjas to see what happened, he said they done got into it wit' some other people they were beefin' wit'. So after that, the other people came outside and then out of nowhere, somebody started shootin', so we got on.

The next day, I found out somebody got shot in the back, and I was thinking that could have been me.

-Tazz

From The Beat: If The Beat is for teaching, what can you teach us from this experience? Did anything change for you coming so close to your own possible death? How many chances do you think you have?

Lucky To Be Alive

I'm lucky I'm still alive because I been shot at a couple of times. I remember before I got locked up, I was walking on the streets with my homeboy. We was slipping, but we didn't give a shhh. Next thing you know we seen a guy throwing up gang signs, so we start throwing up gang signs too. After that, the guy got out the car and took out a shot gun. We didn't have no heat, so we ran. All we heard was gunshots, but thanks to God, me and my homie didn't get hit.

-Cartoon

From The Beat: And thanks to God you weren't packing, because if you had been, it's very likely you would either be paralyzed, dead or serving multiple years behind bars. When you say, "thanks to God," what do you mean? How do you express your thanks? If it was God that spared you from getting hit, then what do you think he spared you for? If you keep breaking His laws, then how are you thanking Him?

Cheating Death

One time I cheated death was when my friends and I had got into it with some girls. One of my friends suggested we play the girls out, and go buy some eggs and go back and throw them at the girls. But as I walked into the store, I heard about five gun shots.

My driver drove off, and later when he came back and got me, we examined the car and found out that there were several holes from the shots where I was sitting. I thought to myself, "If I would've sat in the car a little earlier, my life could've ended."

-DaJuan

From The Beat: Did that thought make you think any deeper about how you're living your life? Did anything change for you after this experience?

Hospital Experience

One hospital experience I had once was when I was involved in a big brawl. Some paisa was getting robbed in front of a bar on while I was walkin' wit' my friends. Then a bunch load of them poured out of the bar.

They started smashin' on my homie, so I jumped in and started fightin' some of them, and while I was fightin' with one of them, one of them hit me on the side of the head. Then the ambulance came and took me to the hospital until my mom came and picked me up. I was hella confused that day.

-Young Speedy

From The Beat: How long did it take your confusion to go away (or, are you still confused)? Was this a fight between rival gang members? If so, we bet that an outsider watching the fight would not be able to tell the difference between the opposing sides...

When I Leave

When I leave to the Ranch, I got to serve a year, but it's nothin'. As long as I ain't got life, I'm good. But a year, it ain't shhh to me. I got two lil' bruhs dat's in here right now fightin' a case.

But other then that, keep y'all head up brush. It's nothin'. We knock time out like it's nothin'. Not that I'm proud of it, but I'ma cut dis until next time you kid return!

-Jeremiah

From The Beat: Here's what we don't understand, Jeremiah. How can giving up even a single day of your life, much less a year, to strangers who have power over your every decision be described as "nothin'?" We're sure you can do the time, but time is all we have in this world, so when will you figure out that doing time for someone else instead of yourself is a pure waste of that precious gift? Good luck at the Ranch.

Cheating Death

I have cheated death. I was there at 16, took two, one to the chest and one to the leg. I remember it like yesterday, me on the ground leaking brain trying to stay alive. But damn, when I was on the ground I was thinking 'bout my mom and my life gone that fast. But you can say I cheated it 'cause I'm here to tell the story to you and to whoever else know the story.

-Ally

From The Beat: Yes, you cheated death, but how many chances to do that will you have? When you were thinking about your mom, did you consider how she would have spent the rest of her life with the pain you caused her? When you think about her now, is there anything you want to do that's different from the way you used to do things?

Stressed To The Max In The Max

Man, right now I am going through it! I ain't never been so stressed in my life. I am facing 707 charges and the Y. I only been locked up once. This is my second time and I am regretting what I did to the fullest. But I got to be a man about it and face it, which is gone be hard for me. I can only pray and hope for the best. I am just gone take it as a learning experience and move on with it.

-One Chance

From The Beat: We can only imagine how stressful it must be to have so little control over your immediate future. We wish there was something we could do, but all we can offer you is this opportunity to put it down on paper and get some of it off your shoulders. Regretting what you did "to the fullest" is a sign of your maturity, and that maturity will help you get through this difficult period in your life.

Cheating Death

Once in my life I cheated death when I was a baby. I was one pound and the doctors had to feed me from a tube. I thank God and my mom for me still being here. Now in life I need to get out and get focus.

-Andrea

From The Beat: You are lucky, Andrea, because low birth weight is the cause of most babies dying. It's one thing to thank God in words. It's another thing to thank Him in actions. Are you doing that? (Next time, Andrea, choose just one topic and write MUCH MORE about it than just a few sentences.)

No More Halls, It's County Time

When I wake up every day, I notice that I'm not a lil' girl any more. I'm 18 now, so I can't keep playing these games with myself thinking that everything is ok, that I'll do my crime and be in the halls doing my time. But no, not this time. They got county for me to do my time.

-Dar Dar

From The Beat: You're right, Dar Dar, the consequences get much harsher from now on. But even if they didn't have those harsh punishments, by the time you're 18, you should realize that you've been acting and thinking and living like a child. You're no longer a child...

Death

One time I was walkin' in Oakland. I was going to go the quick way home, but no! Something told me, "Rhea, go da long way." So I did. When I got to da house, I seen police and stuff. I ask everyone, "What happened?" They said someone shot at the police." Den I thought to myself that if I hadn't walked the long way, I could have been there. It would have been me.

-It Woulda Been

From The Beat: You're lucky you weren't there when it all went down. Do you think that voice that told you to take the long way home was trying to spare you? If so, how do you repay that kind of gift? Any changes planned in your future?

Almost

I almost made it to 4th of July
I almost told my mom I have two kids
I almost had two more kids... Shhh!

But I now I am going back to the Log Cabin Ranch

-Mark

From The Beat: If you have two kids and are still locked up, what do you think this tells us (and the world) about your own sense of responsibility? What a pity you didn't wait to grow into a man before bringing new life into this world.

I Got 'Em

I'm freezin' in this cold-ass world. I keep them thangs blazin'. I'm tryna stay warm. Slang so much ice my money is getting' frost. This is the new Ice Age — not naturally, but chemically.

Made friends tryna keep warm, too. Turn on the flame of the torch, ice meltin' at the bottom of the bong. It ain't no global warming. That's just the torch burnin', so wake up, wake up. It's the first of the month. We doin' it just for the love of money. Gotta get this money, Man, you might catch me at the crossroad, so you won't be lonely. Still sellin' cheese, but more people askin' for ice creams. Like I said befo', I'm sellin' you dreams.

-Lil' Lazy

From The Beat: No, you're not selling dreams, you're pushing nightmares for your own dreams. And, as long as you continue doing that, you'll keep finding yourself dreaming from behind thick walls, and continuing to put money in the pockets of the system.

That Could have been Me

One of my big homie is facing 2nd degree murder on a cop. He's in there for life. That could have been me. But I still love for da homie. Big bra, I really miss you.

When me and my potna was running from some of my enemies, my potna got hit right in the face. I start crying, like, damn, I seen ma life flash in the spur of the moment. Then I was hella mad.

-Fred

From The Beat: We put your two pieces together because by themselves, neither one was enough to publish. Don't you see that the policeman your bib homie is accused of killing had people who loved him just as much as you loved your partner who got shot and made you cry? Don't you see that every life is as precious to someone as those you love are precious to you? Don't you see that not only could it have been you that took that bullet, but under different circumstances, it could have been you that was the cop that got shot!

You Can't Cheat Death

I don't feel I have cheated death because if it's my time to go, it's my time to go. I have been in a situation where I almost have been killed. I was with my bra and my ninja. We had got on some sucka ninjas from the town (they was grown), and we got on them. They both started running, and they came out the alley in a car and shot two times. I got hit in the thigh, and I went to the ice skating rink and they called the ambulance

-Tha Dude

From The Beat: The Hindus believe that everything is already fixed, from the time of your birth until your death, and there's absolutely nothing you can do to change any of it. Is that what you believe when you say, "If it's my time to go, it's my time to go?" Why would God make it so that so many more young men of color find it's "their time to go" than young white men? Is there anything you, or anyone else, can do to contribute to "their time to go" or make it less likely?

Cheating Death

Man, it was a time when ma unc died because he went to save my cousin from being beat up. My unc beat the dude up, but at the time, I was supposed to save my cousin and it was the moment I see my unc get shot up right when I was supposed to walk by da house. I felt it was supposed to be me.

-Jay Pitt

From The Beat: We don't think it was supposed to be you or your uncle, because we think you're supposed to die of old age, not of bullet wounds. Did seeing your uncle lose his life this way change anything about how you live your life?

RIP Great Grandma

I remember when I fell into a depression because my Great Grandmother passed away. Rip Fagastasi. I was mad, sad and in self pity because I was in a group home and wanted to kill myself, but I didn't have the courage to do so. Down in the depression I felt there was to life left.

It took a long time for me to find out that I wouldn't switch no more because my grandma lived a full life until 90, and I would not want her to suffer when she could live a good life in Heaven.

-Halo

From the Beat: We don't think killing yourself shows any kind of courage at all. What takes courage is to live — the choice you've made. If your Great Grandmother thought that she was responsible for your death, how would she feel? It's your responsibility now to live a long life, to keep her memory alive for a long time, and to live up to the expectations she had for you. 90 years is a long time to live. Can you match it?

Sold Out Dreams

They want me in hell for all the sins I committed
 They want me in jail for all the crimes I did
 They want me dead for all the people I made suffer
 Hondurian and Italian blood, the best of both worlds
 Too crazy a mix came out, vicious gang banging issue
 Hogg religious, mind twisted
 So don't risk it 'cause I'm sick
 At 17 like Nas, I'm ill-matic and I'm still-matic
 I gots it for the dope addicts
 I'm selling dreams man, I love helping them fiends
 Ha ha
 Boss lazy hoggin' tru to the 'hood.

-Lil' Lazy

From The Beat: It's you that wants yourself in hell, and it's you that wants you in jail ('cause look around, youngster, they've ALREADY GOT YOU IN JAIL!) You're not selling dreams, you're buying the dreams of all those people making a fortune off your body, and dreaming of what your riches will buy them. You've sold yourself into the hands of the system... at 17, a slave! Good going!

Cheating Death

Yeah, one night I thought I was chalked. Me and ma lil' bra got caught slippin' in the 'jects. This ninja came through yacking at us. And he was on us. But man I thought I was gone for real. And after the shhh was over with, I thanked the man upstairs that I didn't get took.

-Hot Rod

From The Beat: When you thank God for sparing your life, do your words get reflected in your actions? In other words, if you keep doing the things that violate God's laws (and you know what they are), what kind of thanks are you really giving? Is respect to God shown by what you say or what you do?

A Letter To The New Me

I know you can do really good and better in life.
 I know you can reach your goals.
 Finish school
 Get a good degree.
 Get a good stable job

-Jeanette

From The Beat: These are great goals. Concentrate on that first one — finish school! The rest will fall into place.

My Block

I see...
 Familiar faces, childhood friends
 Family members
 Lots of opportunities, both good and bad
 Liquor stores on every corner
 Many women—ugly and good-looking
 People striving for success
 People beginning to give up
 And many who have already lost it
 Police on regular patrols
 Get the shhh up
 Suspicious vehicles creepin' by
 Heads movin' like bobble heads
 'Cause we might miss something
 But it could get knocked off
 Just as easy
 Where I'm from

-Birdman

From The Beat: Good description of your block. But how does your block differ from the next block over? From the block across town? What features, people are on your block that people wouldn't see on the block a mile away?

It's Not A Block, It's Chinatown

Chinatown
 Someone bleeding on the streets
 Someone just became powerful
 Without a heart beat
 Sensing another gang war
 Just like the Golden Dragon massacre
 Drive by soon in a getaway car
 Chinatown
 A war going to break out soon
 Lil' ones getting sent to their doom
 Everything peaceful now
 Right now, just lil' younglings
 Just do unnecessary beating
 Power tripping
 Then soon, POW!
 A war between gangs
 To see who best bangs
 Your homies rest in peace
 Chinatown
 Now you want revenge
 Their homies now rest in peace
 Tension growing
 Soon there' be shootings
 Wasting
 Your life away
 Chinatown

-Bufu Jr.

From The Beat: You write that you can feel the tension of another gang war. If you're right, would it be better for you to still be at the Ranch, so you'll be forced to stay out of it? If you're already home, how would you react? You pretty much know your life may be in danger if you jump into it, and/or you could really harm or actually kill someone else. What is so worth that?

It Could Have Been Me

What's good with da man? Yeah, last week, five of my homies got shot. Three got shot at night; one of 'em was my best friend. He got shot more than a dozen times, and he is on life support.

If I was out, I know I would've been wit' him. I think I would be dead by now if I was out. It's a blessing that all of them are still alive, and it's a blessing that I was locked up.

-Fat G

From The Beat: If being here is a blessing, then how are you using this blessing? What are you doing to take yourself out of the circumstances that lead to the kind of violence you describe here? What is your plan for when this "blessing" of lock-up ends? Will you be back dodging bullets, or do you have different plans that value your life?

Hospital Experience

When I was younger, I left my 'jects when my grandma told me not to leave. I ended up leaving. Then I was rollin' down hill show off ridin' with no hands, turning around, sittin' with my legs on the handle bars, all that shhh.

Then I look back around before I hit the street, look both ways, didn't see no cars. Then out of nowhere, boom! I got hit. I think they ran a red light, but whatever the case may be, I got hit. Then my potnas went to the house, an' shhh, and told my grandma I got hit. She and my cousin came to the hospital, and I was in hella trouble for leaving. But regardless of that, it was nasty.

-D-M

From The Beat: We're not sure which lesson is more important to learn from this experience: don't show off when you're riding a bike on a public road, or don't disobey your grandma! Did you learn those lessons?

You Could Love The Block, The Block Don't Love You

What it do wit' The Beat? This week I'm writing about when I am (in my 'hood,) man, fo' real, man. Young Jeff stay (in my 'hood.) What I see on the block is I see myself. I see females, a lot of females. I see people that I wouldn't wanna see. I see a whole lot of stuff. It's a few things that goes on in the 'hood, to me, it be crackin'.

I can't really explain what goes on on the block. I'm dedicated to (my block,) fo' real. I know that ain't tha way to live, but that's where I grew up at. What I seen when I was growing up on the block is all I know.

I love the block. I know the block don't love me back, 'cause the block ain't got feelings, fo' real. I love what goes on on the block. I love everything about the block, from ma ninjas, to the store, to tha attention, tha respect—everything. I grew up and be on tha block for a minute, so I'm attached to it and I know some people would say I'm stupid for loving something that don't care about you and wouldn't protect you, because tha block ain't safe and I apologize, because I'm not trying to encourage anybody to be on tha block, because tha block ain't coo', but even though I love tha block, I would never put the block before my family. My family always comes first in ma heart.

-Young Jeff

From The Beat: You always write straight from your heart. But from what you write, it sounds like your block has been good to you, unless things have happened on your block that you didn't include here. Can you write more about how the block doesn't love you?

Code Name By Code Name

My dad is a shadow in my mind
At the depth of my personal being
And feelings
Clippings of my life
In chunks of life
If my father was to die
I would cry
And ask God why
He didn't let him suffer and die
A slow death
With a loss of breath
I was bred to hate
The people around me
Life surround me

-Code Name

From The Beat: Your poem is devastating and tragic. It's so sad that you hate your dad so much, but that's real and honest. Who bred you to hate the people around you? If you hadn't written what you did, there would be no way we could know that someone taught you to hate everyone around you.

A Hospital Experience

When I got jumped, they stabbed me in my lung. I died twice on the operating table. I had a tube in my side. They broke my ribs. Now I have one lung and I laugh 'cause I'm still livin'.

-Hyrido

From The Beat: Yes, you're still living, and that is like being given the gift of life twice! How much do you appreciate this gift? Enough to stop putting yourself in situations where you get jumped? How many chances do you think you get?

SANTA CRUZ

Cheating Death

I'm going to tell you about one time I think I almost died. It was on a Friday and I was kicking it with the homies at my pad. We were chugging some pistos and all of a sudden we heard gunshots.

I turned around and I saw a car full of rivals shooting at us. But nobody got hit.

All of a sudden we saw a lot of flashlights. It was a bunch of cops and they wanted to take us in because they thought it was us who had been doing the shooting. They searched us and didn't find anything on us so they let us go. Well, that's my story.

-D

From The Beat: To be shot at and not be hit – that is good luck. And you can make your own good luck by changing your behavior. We know this is not a pleasant thing to think about – but what if one of those stray bullets had hit a loved one, in your house, someone who had nothing to do with gangs and revenge and the bad things that come with that lifestyle. Our point is this: if you don't hang out with people who have 'enemies', your household, and you, will be safer and happier.

Now

It was a season of steel,
loud music throughout the night,
not understanding that violence is real –
always trying to put up a fight.

Now I'm in this cell
for up to a few years,
living through hell,
missing all my dears.

-Jose

From The Beat: This is a terrific poem. We hope you keep writing. You are a talented guy.

Cheating Death

I cheated death by asking for help. I was almost dead. I had taken too much meth. It felt so weird because I did not know how I got to places. Even the light would bother me. Sometimes I felt I was almost dead and every single thing would bother me.

-E

From The Beat: We are so glad that you decided to get help. That was very smart of you. Maybe, when you recover and have your life together, you can help others to stay away from meth by sharing your story.

*Now I'm in this cell
for up to a few years,
living through hell,
missing all my dears*

I Love To Dream

I like to smile, once in a while,
but when I frown, you can tell I'm feeling down.
But most of the time I'm up (^)
and when I'm sleepy I get things over with
so I can be dreamy.

But when I have a bad dream, I wake up screaming.
I love to dream.

-Jose

From The Beat: Some folks believe that every dream is a perfect poem, that if you could write down your dreams, accurately, just as they occurred, you'd have a great book of poems. There is nothing extra in a dream, just as there is nothing extra in a good poem – nothing that does not need to be there.

My Life

I am the type of person who never regrets anything I have done. 'Til now all I can seem to do is think back at all the things I have done wrong.

The most recent thing I can think of is about five days back. I was with a friend of mine at his house. It was about 10:00 pm. My phone ringing left and right, switchin' from my dad to my auntie. They wanted me home. I told my friend this an' he said, "Go home," but yet each time he said this, I would just say, "No!"

How I wished I would have listened to my friend. Later he left an' walked me across the street to my ride, that would end me up in this place where I now sleep.

-Delia

From The Beat: The voice you really have to listen to is that little voice in your head that tells you to do what's right. We all have those little voices. Especially when it's telling you what you don't want to hear, is when you must really listen to it. It's trying to keep you out of any mess.

I Miss My 'Hood So Much

I wake up in my drawers
Sun shining bright
The lady on my left
The condom wrapper on my right
I step outside on the porch on my block
Kids running crazy
Their mommy's looking on
I go inside, take a shower,
Then I'm out, get all freshed up
Tell the lady she has to bounce
I got in my car, driving slow
Kids having water fights
I call up my homie and tell him
If he wants a ride tonight
Summer I'm missing
Last time in this place
I miss my 'hood so much

-Big Swol

From The Beat: Is this the story of a typical day for you? You're dismissive and disrespectful of the "lady to the right" next to you in bed, especially when you tell her "to bounce," don't you think? If she has any sense, she won't be back. Show respect!

Last One

I was the last one born in my family—all my brothers and my dad been to jail. My big brother that is eighteen is on his way to San Quentin, but when he get out, I'm going to give him everything.

They said it's in my blood that I am a criminal, and my destiny is the pen, but I can't let that happen.

My mom said that she was sorry, but how could she be sorry? I told her, "Don't feel sorry for me, 'cause I am the one that did the crime, so I have to do the time," but it's cool—it like a break for me, being in here. I am the last one born and it will never be another one after me, so I'm a think about my mom, dad, my big sisters and big brothers, make money the right way, and share it with them and stay on my toes.

-Bam Bam

From The Beat: You know that it's totally up to you who you become, not your "blood," or anything genetics can cause. Your family sounds like they need someone to stay solid, reasonable, to be the rock in your family. Could you become the one who works hard at a legitimate job, who stays cool, the one who the others come to for help, advice? It would be a big job. Are you ready for it?

The Streets

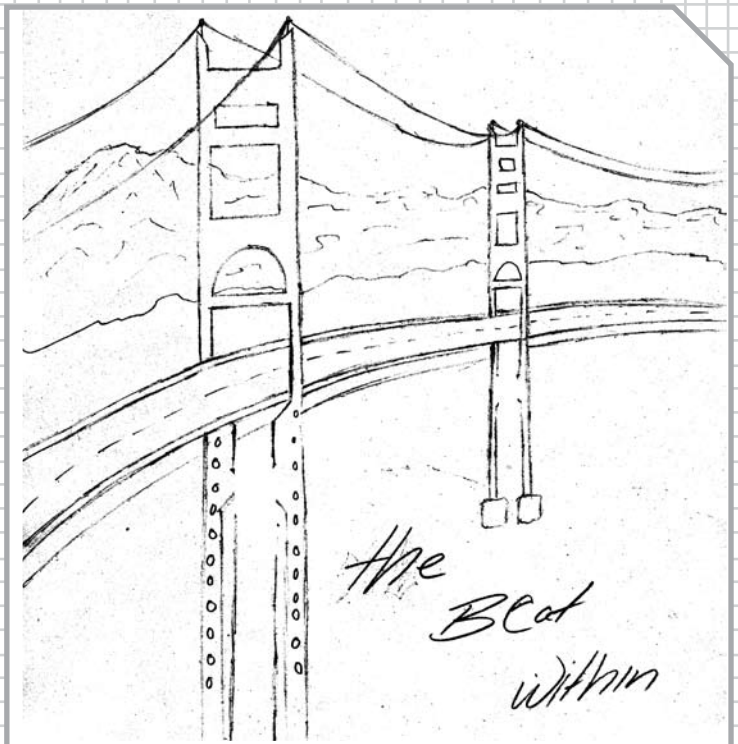
The streets change your original character and force you into someone you're not. It's not the streets, but it's the mentality of old tradition. It brings pain and sorrow, reverence, betrayal, and trauma.

On the other hand, there is much fun! But life is all about balance. The most important is: love, wisdom, honor, respect, integrity and strength.

Hopefully one day people will realize what they are doing and try to improve this world. It's not the streets with the people, it's the people of the streets.

-Curtis

From The Beat: Can you give examples from your own life how the streets have radically changed someone's personality, attitudes, behavior? What about you? How will you protect yourself from the lure of the streets when you're free again?



My Family

I love my family a lot. They have always been there for me. My dad, who I love so much, wants me out, and my mom, too. I love them so much. Every time I need something, they are always there. My brother took care of me when I was a little girl. My sisters did, too. They fed me, showered me, played with me, and I am very grateful.

I love to hang out with my little nieces. They are ten and thirteen years old, and I love hanging out with my nephew. He is six. I used to take care of them. Ever since I was small, I took care of them. I fed them, showered them, played with them. I still take care of them, but now they are getting older and stronger, but I love them forever—all my family.

-Andrea

From The Beat: Why do your parents want you to leave home? If you're not ready to be out on your own, why don't you tell your parents that and help out? Wash dishes? Cook? Vacuum? Can you get a part-time job after school and on weekends? Help them with the rent or mortgage? Are you planning to go to college? Will you need a room or an apartment on your own or with a roommate? Maybe your parents can help you become independent.

It Could Have Been Me

About a couple of months ago I was out chillin' with my friends. We were by my friend's house and it was getting late. Everyone was plannin' to walk to my other friend's house and then my other friend's ride came. Me and two of my friends hitch a ride with them.

Thirty minutes later he gets a call saying that my friends walkin' home got shot at. No one was hurt badly but if I would have just stayed a little longer that could have been me and or something could have been worse.

-Lai

From The Beat: You made the right choice that night. Any idea why someone would start shooting? Is this what our communities are turning into? Young people taking target practice on one another? Hope not. What are your thoughts on guns?

My Uncle

It could have been me? I didn't really know how to gang bang. I just did and followed what my uncle did. Hang my colored rag and try to always wear as much of our color as I could. He taught me more and more so he could make me like him. He did this because he was an OG, and he wanted me on top too.

Well, one day we went to pick up his lady so he can take her out to eat, and she was seven month pregnant with my uncle's kid. When we drove off from our pad we heard a gunshot and it went through the car and landed in the back. Then I hear another. Then everything went quiet. My uncle was quiet and I realized he got shot on the side of his ribs. He parked the car and once the ambulance took him to the hospital, I waited for a call. They called and said he had died, then I thought, I could be him or could've been him in the future. That's why it could have been me.

-Nephew

From The Beat: Did you learn anything from this experience? Has it made you look at your life differently? How important is gang banging to you? Do you too want to be a casualty to a senseless war? Hope not!

Cheating Death

One day me an my friend we was walking to my other friend house to go and pick him up and we was hanging out in the front of his house and then we walked to my house an then we walked across the street. There was a car and it stopped at the stop sign. They put the car in park an got out. I think they were drunk. So they get out an one shouts, "What's up? Where you from?"

Me an my friend we was like, "I'm from here."

And they ask my friend, "Where you from?"

He was like, "I'm from the"

When they all got out-out, the guy in the back was like, "Pop the trunk an get the gun out!"

And that's when they ask us where we was from, an we told them.

We later walked to the store an we seen them again, and we was in the store an we was looking at them as we walked out the store. He was muggin' me and I told my brother an then my brother told my cousin, and that's my story.

-Stop The Muggin'

From The Beat: If you are from the wrong part of town, you get blasted, and if you are from an OK part of town you get mugged? Not cool. No one owns these neighborhoods and the neighborhoods don't mean shhh, once you are dead or in a prison yard. We hope you see that life is more important than what neighborhood you claim.

Eighth Grade Graduation

It was time of year where I only had a couple of months to graduate. I was doing badly on the other two trimesters so I know I had to straighten up and just focus for those few months. I had to at least have 2.00 GPA, and have no referral on the last month. So not only did I have to do my school work and get higher than a D (grade), but I have to behave and stop acting up and do what I was told.

Graduating was all my parent wanted me to do, so I knew I couldn't let them down. Also if I graduated I would be able to attend the 8th grade dance every 8th grader has been talking about since the beginning of the year, and we would also go to Great America for our field trip and not to mention also the big 8th grade ceremony that everybody expected you to be there.

I was just a month and a week from graduation day and I actually was able to pass the 2.00 GPA requirement and I didn't get I any trouble so I knew I was going to make it. I was so happy and excited.

Just when I was a few weeks away, I got kicked out of school for something that wasn't true, I was so mad and I felt weird because I was only a few weeks away from reaching my goal, with the most important thing right now was that I was going to graduate from the middle school. Plus, a couple of days later was my cousin's graduation day, a cousin I thought that wouldn't have made it, but he did. He came to my house and invited me, but I couldn't, I had house arrest. I was happy he made it but not happy because I didn't made it.

-David

From The Beat: Will you tell us what you got kicked out of school for? Did your parents argue for you? What did you do the day of the eighth grade graduation? What's your plan so you someday will graduate from high school and hopefully college? May we ask, what brings you to juvenile hall? The time is now to take a different road, or high school is going to be a drag.

A Weird Experience

One time I was waiting for the bus at the bus stop. Then this guys came out of nowhere and walked by pointing at the cars saying that he can dance better than them. I think he was drunk or on drugs when he passed by me. He pointed at me and said he knew he could dance better than me and laughed. Then he did a spin and danced away like Michael Jackson.

-NotoriousViet

From The Beat: That is one crazy story. Sounds like this can only happen in the city.

Lets Go Get Stone At Any Cost

Dear Beat Within,

I would wake up every morning thinking about how I am going to get high. Sometimes I would steal my mom's money. I can't even lie.

I would be walking down the street sometimes wanting to cry but its okay sometimes wanting to cry but it's okay. Pretty soon I would have that blunt in my mouth you know blowing dem fat ass clubs. I would smoke so much till my lungs gave out.

I can't believe I'm doing this, I'm killing myself. I would fall asleep and wake up thinking again lets get stone

-Stone crazy

From The Beat: You see the problem. The question is what will it take to stop? How bad do you want to change your ways?

A Bad Scene

When I think back to this day, I knew I made a big mistake knowing that it was kind of my fault.

It all started on a cold winter night in my backyard. I was with two of my homies and we were drinking liquor, getting drunk.

After we ran out of drink I brought up the idea of going to 7-11. At first my friends didn't want to go but I still convinced them. So then we put on our jackets and started walking, knowing that to get there we had to pass through our enemy's hood.

As we were almost there we seen two of our enemies and we started talking shhh to them, then they ran 'cause they thought we were going to jump them. So we kept walking in the middle of the street and it was like really early in the morning.

We started hearing whistling and as we turned back we seen like fifteen heads with chains, bats, and knives.

As we started running away, one of my homies had decided to split up from us. We had seen some apartments and found a place to hide. After a few minutes, five of them spotted us. They jumped us, but we didn't get that hurt and got away and ran back to my house. We were worried.

After like twenty-minutes we hear a knocking on the door and it was my friend. He was all bloody from head to toe. I told him that he needed to go to the hospital but he didn't want to go. His head was dripping blood from his head. I took my moms car and took him to the hospital and left him there, a couple days later I went to visit him and he told me the doctors told him that if he would, have came in a few minutes later he would have died. I always think that could have been me

-Junior

From The Beat: You write up one dramatic story. You probably felt horrible given you were the one who wanted to go to the store that early morning, after a night of drinking. Did what happened to your friend make an impact on his or your life? What has changed?

Fast Thinking

What it is Beat? This yo' boy Krazy. Yaddadamean. Well anyway I am gon' write 'bout a time that I could have died.

I was wit' my potna out on the block and we was just chillin'. We were standing across the street and there was a car on the other side. This guy came out from the alley, with a bandana around his face wit' a hoody over his head. He walked up to the car and the passenger got out and ran. The masked guy made it to the driver's side, and without sayin' anything he pulled out a burner and put dude's brains on the head rest. I saw his brains and blood splatter on the side window.

Me and my homie then split up and I ran to the corner. Right when I was 'bout to turn, cement and brick shattered from the wall and hit the side of my face and shoulder. I ran six blocks. I stopped behind a store and I thought I got hit 'cause blood was comin' from my right ear. It was only 'cause the cement. I was hella scared, my heart was beating faster than a machine gun. Almost crapped my pants. I could have been hit, and I'm glad I'm a fast runner.

Well that's my story. But I got to go. Keep ya'll heads up everybody! Yaddadamean.

-Krazy

From The Beat: That is one ugly and unforgettable crime you witnessed. Too bad you had to witness such an act. We are glad nothing happened to you that evening.

Crystal

It was about March, 15, 16, and I was pissed at my brother because he took my new Airforce (Nikes) to work with my dad and my dad works in landscaping so I had to wear my old shoes.

I was riding my bike to my friend's house and was planning not to go home for at least a week, because I knew that if I would go home that same day, I would of started cussing out my brother and he wasn't going to have it, and he'd start pushing and start swinging at me, so I decided to stay away from home for at least a week, so I stayed with one of my homies.

It was about nine o'clock at night when another homie came by and he had some crystal (meth), he had about three dubs and his pipe so he said, "Lets hot box!" so we said ok, so he jumped in the truck and start putting crystal in the pipe and took a hit then I was next and took a hit, so the night went by hella fast, we stayed up all night, it was about six in the morning and we were still awake and my homie that let us stay in his Chevy was coming from work so we told him hey let go.

-A Long Night

From The Beat: Was this the only time you did crystal? We hope this is not something you made a habit out of. As for your brother and the shoes, wow, our family didn't mind you not coming home for a week?

Changing

I see myself changing
changing to a new person.

Growing up
from drugs an gangs,
to making a big change.

From seeing myself down and looking foolish and like a clown,

to sobering up an bettering myself an washing the dirt off my name.

To talking pride for who and what I am,
a half Black half Hispanic young man,

and getting up an out there an to see what is the big plan.

Either I'm going to curl up an let life take an forget who I am,

or make something of myself an become a man.

-Youngin'

From The Beat: What do you have in store for yourself? Tell us your plans?

A Bad Day

One day when I was ten years old I was walking to the store with my friend, we went to buy some chips and a soda, and when we were on the way home there was a gang of guys in front of some apartments they were wearing gang shirts and with their rags throwing gang signs to a car that passed by.

Me and my friend were just looking from inside. The guys in the car turn around and busted out a gun and started shooting the guys that were standing in front of the apartments, hopefully no one died, but one of the bullets hit my friend in his leg and I did know what to do, so we went to his house and my friend's mom called the police and the ambulance and the next day I went to my friends house and he was ok.

-Close Call

From The Beat: Sounds like you were at the wrong place at the wrong time. What is different about today? Are you smarter? Are you avoiding this gang life? Hope so.

A Hospital Experience

I was fifteen years old when I had a hospital experience
 It is about my grandma on her death bed
 I went to the side of her bed, I gave her kisses and I gave
 her some tears
 Telling her what a good grandma she was
 She had one breath and she died
 I went outside, I cried and started swinging at the walls
 She loved our family and all four of us
 Now I am next to her bed crying
 Now I am here thinking about how she was
 I hope she's looking down at me from above
 Not thinking I'm a bad kid
 But, Grandma I tell ya I'll see you above in heaven
 For now, goodbye, I love you Grandma.

-Creeper

From The Beat: This is a really nice tribute to your grandma. But we both know that the tribute she would love the most is for you to find a way to stay crime free and, therefore, jail free. Show your love by being the grandson she knew you could be.

Could Of, Would Of But Wasn't Me

G-vole Beaters? Well this is Smiley coming out of this unit like what. But its coo', I get out July 28th! Yup, with four months EMP.

Well, anyways there was a topic that caught my eye. It's called: "It could have been me." Well, a couple of months ago a couple of my homies were on a high speed chase and they ended up in the hospital, but they're good now and I thank God for that. Well, that could have been me 'cause I be getting stolo's (g-riders) too and I could of ended up in a hospital, maybe even dead - you never know. But at the time when that happened I was locked up so maybe even sometimes it's good to be locked up. But yea you still never know - it can happen any day. So stay coo' off them stolo's (g-rides) and keep your head held up high. And I'm out wit' my utmost love and respect.

-Gina

From The Beat: There is a lot of wisdom and advice in this piece. It was for the best that you were locked up the day that your friend's crashed the car. Does what happened to them and being locked up make you think that next time you have the chance to ride in a stolo, that you'll turn it down?

To My Cousin, RIP

Just as it was going good,
 Two weeks 'till I hit the hood,
 I make one phone call that puts tears in my eyes,
 My little cousin goes and dies,
 I look to the ceilin' wondering why,
 Then I ask God why you have to make us cry,
 He was only eight years old, what the hell did he do,
 On the field was number two,
 But when I looked in his eyes all I saw was fame,
 That as much as he loved that football game,
 Some people say twins are one of a kind,
 But this twin didn't make it to nine,
 As they put my lil cousin to rest,
 All I can do is hope my aunty the best.
 RIP Isais M.
 1999-2007

-Droopy

From The Beat: Such a tragedy to lose your baby cousin. Too young. What did he die from? We send you and your family our respects. RIP Isais.

Everything about me

So, where should I start? Let me start off by my name: I'm not just the one and only but I'm the original Little Mousie. It all started when I was 11 turning 12. I moved to Modesto during that age and ever since than I haven't been the same.

I'm not the same sweet girl I used to be. (Smile) When I move to Modesto, that's when everything went downhill. I started smoking dope, popping pills and all that good stuff.

I guess my Grandma couldn't handle me so she moved me to Fresno with my brother.

My mom wasn't around during that time and my Dad was in prison, so I felt like I was on my own. In Fresno I hated it cause nobody was from San Jose.

My brother moved me back from Modesto, so I was living with my aunt on the Southside and I started to runaway. While I was on the streets I met this homeboy name "Chino." Damn, this homboy is so fine and I love him so much. And I'm still with him till this day. Everything was going good with me and him but I starting tweaking again. And he didn't like it at all.

So that's when the controlling comes in, but I'm not gonna get into that. I've been with Chino for one year and some months. Half of the time we were together I was locked up, but it's okay. Chino and I been through so much shhh together. I regret sneaking out to do drugs. And what trips me up about it is out of all the boyfriends I have had, I was never faithful. But with Chino, I guess he really has got a hold on me.

But anyways, I'm really hoping I will change my life cause I've been down for so long and I'm tired of being here. But it is what it is and I can't change nothing about me, just my way of thinking. When you're locked up what can you really change? Nothing, 'cause your not on the outs. So since your locked up you can't change, being on the outs, well that's the real challenge you look forward to.

-Juzette

From The Beat: I believe that you can change and from the sound of your words, you are working towards changing whether you are in or on the outs. I think you can rise to the challenge and make a difference.

Drinkin' Again

Hey what's cracking Beat? Well its this homeboy Troubles coming from the streets of Gilroy. About todays topic, one time when I was out with some homeboys from my hood we went to the park and drank. We were over there having a good time, but I got really drunk.

When we left the park, we went to my homeboys pad and we were chilling out side I was passed out laying on the ground, but some one called the cops. But by the time the cops got there we were in the house. They went in and got me up, the I spit on the cop and they restrained me.

After they called the ambulance and took me to the hospital. Then I went back home in the morning not remembering what happened, but later that day my PO came and took me in for a violation of probation.

So that's why I'm going to try and not drink a lot when I get out, by the way Beat I got sentenced to YA alternative today.

So 'till next time, to all stay up and this homeboy is out, lates.

-Troubles

For The Beat: Drinkin' is a huge problem. We hope you have the courage and desire to clean yourself up, otherwise this road is only going to get harder.

Someone Looking Down On Me

You can't tell when death will come, but I tell myself it could come soon. I hear other people killing themselves or people killing them. I say to myself it could have been me. My life wasn't easy. My life was hard like a rock. I went through things I didn't want to happen. There was times I got whopped, but the worst of all was cheating death. I don't know what saved me, but it seems to me there is someone looking down at me.

-V

From The Beat: This piece would be better if you included some examples of how and when you cheated death. Plus, we would like to know your thoughts on why you think you've been spared. If someone is looking down on you, what do you think someone expects from you?

This Life

This life of sin, now tell me where do I begin?

I've rejected my whole life.

Now I am just sitting here listening in,

Every day is a struggle.

Sitting here thinking to myself, "Where the hell did I go wrong?"

Living in this life of hell with so much pain running through my veins.

Why does God let me live when my life is so full of pain?

I keep longing for sleep more than I would seek a valuable treasure.

Nothing could make me happier than to be gone.

Why do I go on living when my life is so miserable and so bitter?

I have no peace or rest, just troubles and worries.

Now I am stuck and still hurting.

My baby's mom got me going insane,

So much shhh running through my mind.

Blind as a cloud of smoke with all these thoughts running through me.

I have got to learn to deal with it because, oh, this shhh is starting to eat me up.

I pray every day that one day everything will be OK

And I pray that I can see my son be born.

-Rascal

From The Beat: We wish we had some magical words to make you feel better, RL, but only you can do that. If we could share any advice with you, it would be that what you see today and what you feel is just a snapshot of your life. Your life is not a still shot, but a moving picture, so don't make the mistake of thinking that things will always be the same. They won't. They will change. If you can find the courage to hold on through this dark period, we think that both maturity and opportunity will come bringing some bright spots that, from where you sit now, it's hard for you to imagine. Don't give up!

When I Get Out

When I get out I thought I wanted to go to the mall meet some girls, chill with my boys all that good stuff. But I talked to my uncle and I want to have a family reunion 'cause some of the other family members have fell off the map. Hopefully I ain't gone too long, but I wanna see how everyone's doing. I'm sure they all got a bunch of questions to ask me. I can't wait to see my brother's kids and chill with my cousins. My lil' cousin's fifteen and she's pregnant and I'm sure her kid will be born already by the time I get out. I'm gonna miss a lot of events. But it'll be good to see everyone.

-Blizz

From The Beat: Yes indeed we like your thinking here. Glad you have such an uncle to help you prioritize and understand what is most important, and that is family.

A Tough Time

Dear Beat Within...

There was one time I almost died and there was a time I wished I was dead. The first time I almost died was, I was crossing the street to go say what's up to my homie and out of nowhere a truck almost hit me. I was like two feet away from getting hit by a truck.

The time I wished I was dead was when I was taken away from my family and put into a foster home. My whole life got turned around. I had to live with a different family, follow their rules, eat their food. Every night when I was little, I would cry under my blankets, missing my family, hoping I could go back to them.

-Longing for home

From The Beat: Too many of us have carelessly crossed the street and have almost been taken out by a moving vehicle, then again too many people die daily from cars and trucks too - look both ways. We need to be on our toes when crossing the street and not think we are invincible. As for getting pulled out of your home. That's rough. We hope things are better for you with your family and you also take charge in getting back home from juvenile hall.

The Long Walk

One time me and my cousin were walking down the street whe some rivals came up and started shooting. I ducked down, but my cousin got shoot and then they saw the roller coming by. Then they ask me a lot of questions about what we were doin'. I told them we were just walking and we saw them there. They asked us why we didn't try to run and my cousin said 'cause he wasn't scared, 'cause he did not know they had a gun. That was the last day we walk down that street, 'cause we knew the guys are still out there waitin' for us to come by so they could kill us this time. Ok Beat that all for today, catch you next time with more, I am out.

-Too much

From The Beat: Well sadly you know what street not to walk down.

Chased

Today I am going to write about cheating death.

One night I was alone skating. I had about forty-bucks on me and wanted to drink and smoke so I called up my homie whose over twenty-one to get some beer.

He said, "sure, why not." So he called me back twenty minutes later and told me to head to his pad.

I got there about ten-minutes later and he was chillin' in his garage, so he let me in told me he was going to get ready and be down in a minute. He got ready to go to the store and I asked if I could go?

He said, "alright lets go, so we're walking towards the store when we see hella people come out of the apartments with bats, so we started running. They hit my homie with the bat in the back and we turned to fight and all of them just jumped us. Me and my homie got beat pretty bad so I got up to check him and he wasn't moving, so I called an ambulance and they took him to the hospital.

I went there with him and waited for like an hour and they finally came out and told me he had lacerations to his face and he had been stabbed. I didn't know what to think I had felt pretty bad but they told me he' going to be ok and till this day we still kick it and think what we could've done something better or different to make that night go better and avoid that. Well that's all for now. Alrato.

-Shawn

For The Beat: Out of nowhere you were chased and beaten? That's so wrong. Is there anything you did to provoke the chase? What's in store for the future? What are your plans to avoid fighting and further incarceration?

In The Hospital

What's up Beat? This is JR. It all started back in November when I was an idiot. Me and a couple of my friends car jacked a car and took the cops on a high speed chase and crashed in Sunnyvale. I don't remember what happened, all I know is that I crawled out knowing that I was still alive then I blacked out and that's when the hospital part comes....

I wake up handcuffed to the bed with a I-V in my arm and full of blood and with a neck brace on and hearing my mom crying with a smile knowing that her son was all right.

You know what Beat? There's too much to this crazy story of mine in plus the times almost up so I would like to end this with much love & respect.

-JR

From The Beat: Why would you robbed someone of their car? Why would you put your life on the line? When will the stupidity stop? Is this any fun? Doubt it.

Safe Sex

There have been many moments in my life that I said, "It could have been." But one moment sticks out in particular. While I was in the hall this year, it was that time to get the letters and I didn't get any, but my roommate got two.

At first, I was really pissed off because I didn't get mail. I quickly fell asleep but I woke up with a letter in my face, and my roommate saying, "read this shhh!" I read it and it said, "Baby, I'm pregnant!"

At first, I could not stop laughing for about two hours, but then after, I realized my roommate was actually depressed. He kept saying, "my life is over." I realized that it was actually all bad for him and I thought to myself, "that could have been me."

I used to do my thang all the time without a condom, but now I always remember to wrap it up tight. What I took away from this experience is that something small like that could have messed my whole life up. And I shouldn't need to go through a traumatic situation to learn not to do from it.

-Jackie

From The Beat: What you took from that experience may be a very valuable lesson. Not just to protect you from becoming a parent prematurely, but also because of the STD's out there. You can never know what someone may have, or not have from just looking at them. We're you able to support your roommate a little more, after you found out that he was depressed? How is he dealing with it now? There are so many lessons in life that we can learn from, without having to go through them. Hopefully you're able to see some of those other lessons as well!

Some Real Talk

What's rockin' Beaters? Well, it's that funky fresh S, comin' at you wit' some positive type game, mayne!

Well I'm a rap some game to these young ones sittin' up in they cells, mayne, soakin' up this knowledge... For those who went through some trials and tribulations, and lost, just remember there's always another day. So don't take it as a loss - matter of fact, take it as a lesson learned. 'Cause what don't kill you make you stronger, and that's somethin' I've learned!

On some real talk cuddy's! Make ya next moves ya best moves, 'cause it might be ya last...

Well I'm a cut it up Beaters. Be easy!

-S

From The Beat: We appreciate the wisdom and lessons you've learned, and the fact you're willing to share them with us all. Now that you have our attention, what else can you share with us that will teach us how to make better moves in life?

Another Day!

Hey, what's up Beat? Well, yeah it's your girl Lizeth, once again, chilling and writing what's on my mind. Well, today I had a rough day. I went to court and everything went all-bad. I was hoping to bounce out of this bootsie place. Two more weeks until my next court date and maybe then I'll be gone.

When I was on the outs, I was always influencing people to drink and get high with me. I would pretty much drink and smoke until I was gone. Being locked up has me mad, but it's a good thing cause it's keeping me away from drugs longer than I ever thought. I know that I'm not missing on a lot because no matter how long I'm in here, the homies and the homegirls always going to be there to provide me with what this girl wants. Even tho' I hella miss my famila, but am still staying strong because am now paying the consequences.

Well guess what Beat? I'm tired of writing ,so I gonna let you go and thanks for listening because it really helps me. Much love and respect to all those that are doing time.

-Lizeth

From The Beat: It sounds that even though you are down from a bad day in court, you can recognize that being locked up is helping you with some of your problems. It sounds like you've had some time to really reflect on your friends and how you used to spend time with them. Now, seeing them will be even better now that you can recognize them for who they are.

The New Me

Hey what's up? This is a little something about the new me. I thought it was the thing to be a gang banger, but that is all in the past now. I got to be a man and take care of my family, my son who I miss so much. It sucks not being able to be with him. To show him right from wrong. And I want him to be someone. To change something in the world.

Well, I gots to go now but I'll be here next week. Up and out. Late.

-Alex

From The Beat: That's good that you want to be there for your family and son. We believe if you leave the gang banging lifestyle behind, that all of what you really want can be accomplished. It may be hard along the way but stay focused and motivated. You know why you're leaving the past, in the past. And in the process you'll be showing your little man a very valuable lesson in life.

Cheating Death Thanks To Thizzing

Once I was at the Bomb Concert at the HP Pavilion and I was all thizzed out, and hella drunk. And I was just inside listening to the people there. I remember listening to Keak and E-40, and by the time it was over I just wanted to go out to the front and get high.

So I was getting out and hella people were there and I went to the side by the creek. And then I was with my boys and got hella high. Some ninja's were in the parking lot and something cracked off and some foo's got blasted. Then all I remember is hella people dropping down to the floor and I was still standing up all by myself.

All I heard was a bullet fly past my ear and straight to the palm tree behind me. And I know if I would of just dropped, it would've not even been close to me. But I guess I was just too thizzed out, too high and hella drunk.

-Dough Boy

From The Beat: That must have been some type of experience! It sounds like you're saying if you weren't so intoxicated you would have reacted better to the situation. Is this the only time you think that drugs and/or alcohol have impaired your decision making? Does this experience give you any thoughts of not being so careless with your use of mind/mood altering substances?

Giving Back

Q-vole (What's up) Beat? How you Beaters been doing? Well tonight I want to talk about the topic, To Be About Pride. 'Cause teenagers now a days are talking about my pride means the world to me. Or my homies are me family 'cause they are always proud of me. Or the streets is all I know.

Well Beat, I'm here to give you the definition of being proud; "as or an inordinate self-esteem." And proud means; "feeling or showing pride."

Those definitions are to the words that are encouraging me to change and look for a new future. To attain my goals and to help those who are in need. Like troubled youth 'cause I wanna make a difference in someone's life.

Like someone made in mine. And those people are Mr. Rocker, Dimas Martinez from MOCSA, and Allan Martinez from The Beat Within, 'cause their advice always stuck in me. And now I realize that advice could take me to success.

-Jc

From The Beat: What you've just shared with us all, and what you want to do as far as giving back, we believe is some of the reason why the people you've mentioned do what they do. We appreciate you acknowledging those people, because a lot of times those people rarely see the fruits of their labor. You achieving success and seeing your real potential, is part of the reason why those people you've mentioned do what they do. And now that you know what it takes, please share that knowledge with others. As others have shared it with you!

I Can't Get Mad At Cha

Hey homie, how you doin?

I would like to know.

I got my hand on my forty,

'Bout to pour the whole,

Dedicated to the homies gone

Before me getting' swole

We done made some mistakes

So we had to part ways

And now I can't get mad at cha

For trying to change

'Cause it's time

For us to get our life on track

And no matter what I'll have your back

So to my family

Brothers

We'll always have each other

Love my homies with all my heart

Do your thing to achieve your goals

Ain't no one hating.

-Khi

From The Beat: Now these are some qualities of being a real homie should be. To be able to support someone, especially when they're trying to do something positive for themselves. Which may be something different from how we've known them. We can only hope that you too get that same support from those who are still living that lifestyle.

When I woke up I was in a hospital bed, then I over heard the Doctor saying I was an inch away from losing my life.

Scratch Card Game

The day I thought it could have been me, was when one of my homie's won ten g's on a scratch card game. It was coo' 'cause I was there scratchin' a losin' card. I was thinkin' in my head like, "damn it should've have been my card and I would've won." I kept thinkin' in my head, "the card was mine 'cause I was there and saw it and also hold it." But really, I got a losing trash card.

-Lil' Family

From The Beat: Man, that must have been a trip for you. Did your homie give you some of the money he won? If he did, did that make it you feel a little better? Do you still play those scratch card games?

Might As Well

Change requires effort

So change, feel me;

Might as well

While we have a chance

Go ahead and dance;

Out in the rain

Just go out and prance.

-Jonathan

From The Beat: That's pretty unique! What inspired you to write this piece? Was something going on with you at the time that made you think along these lines?

NEW MEXICO

A Letter To Me

In my past I always did things on my own. When I was ten years old I did what I wanted to do, so when people told me what to do I didn't do what they wanted me to.

When I got involved with the law and they had too many rules and I didn't like those rules I did what I wanted to do, like run from probation and the cops, but when I got caught and locked up I told them what they wanted to hear from me.

Some times when I'm in my room I trip out on my self cause I look back in my past and my past is all messed up and now I am a changed man.

-Vincent

From The Beat: Vincent, are you a change man? It almost sounds like you are doing what you did in the past; telling yourself what you want to hear. It's easy to say you're a changed man; it's another to be a changed man. When some one is locked up they will say just about anything just to get out of jail. Make that change and be a better man.

Cheating Death, Almost OD'd

In 2004 I was a hardcore partier, I smoked weed, drank, popped pills, I just didn't care. But one night my mind changed, it was a normal party for me, just drinking and smoking but then on thing led to another and I bought twenty valiums. I handed some out and kept seven or eight to my self.

I remember taking them and drinking like twenty beers. I was fine for a while then I was puking and being tossed into a shower.

When I woke up I was in a hospital bed, then I over heard the Doctor saying I was an inch away from losing my life. That is how I feel I've cheated death.

-Bugs

From the Beat: Yes you did cheat death by taking the pills and mixing the alcohol that is a sure way to end your life. We do hope it was a wake up call for you. The next time you feel like picking up an alcoholic drink keep in mind alcohol is one of the leading causes of our teen deaths.

The Life I Live

Times are always considered hard, especially for me. All I ever wanted to be was with my family or with someone who could love and care for me. I have done a lot of stupid things, which I try and learn from. I have been trying to change since the third grade, because I want to break my family chain of doing bad things and being ignorant.

Well, I succeeded some, but not all, because my third time being in the hall and a baby on the way and at such a young age. This is not going to stop me, though. I am going to keep this kid, go to school and get a job for my kid and me, and most importantly, my lil' sis.

Ma lil' sis, aka Lil' Mama, means the world to me and I miss being around her. She loves me and I love her. I also have a nephew whose life I wish to be in, and hope that he doesn't have to go through what I did.

-Chocolate Mama

From The Beat: You have been through some experiences that should never happen, and all of us should be ashamed that we allow any child to suffer what you have. At the same time, you bring a young woman's wisdom to the problems you face, knowing that every "failure" is a lesson to learn in order to succeed in the future. We don't know what brings you here, but we do know that your little sister needs you (as you need her), and that your new nephew will be that much poorer without you in his life. Make the changes you know you need to make. Think of your nephew when you are again free, and whenever you're tempted to do something that could lead you to lose your freedom, ask yourself if you'd want him to see you doing it. If the answer is no, then don't do it!

It Should Have Been Me

An overdose
At the age of sixteen
It should have been me
Stuck a needle in his arm
Thinking everything was going to be okay
Years later, I start smoking the same thing
While holding a blade to my wrist
Knowing it should have been me
I ask him not to hate me
For making the same mistakes
I even ask him to trade places with me
After I'm done smoking the tar
I realize I'm the only one killing me
And if he was still here
He wouldn't want it to be me

-Skater Girl

From The Beat: In a way, you did trade places with him by smoking the same drug that killed him. But you are more fortunate, because you have opened your eyes before they close permanently, and seen that this is your life and your future, and nobody else's. You have the power to get control of it, and we can see from this that you have the brains to do it. One life is all we're given. Don't throw it away for anyone!

It Could Have Been Me

It could have been me
When I see girls raped, stabbed and killed on TV
I think, "It could have been me"
When I see girls acting like me
Doing the same things
But at the end, they do nothing
But keep on repeating their deals 'til the end
It could have been me
When I see attractive girls getting hurt
I just thank God... He let me think
Before the rapist got to me first

-Nie Nie

From The Beat: This is a scary piece to read, Nie Nie. We don't know if you're talking about a real rapist whose victims you know, or whether you're speaking in general, but either way, it's not something that a young woman like you should have to worry about. It's a wicked world, but there are also girls who have accomplished great things. Do you ever look at them and say to yourself, "It could have been me." We think it still could be you.

My Father Shot My Brother

I remember when I was little, living with my dad. He was and still is a gangbanger, and is an alcoholic. He used to take my brother in my dad's room, and he used to threaten his life with a gun if he didn't do something right. Or, if me and my brother would argue, he would always get in trouble for it. I would always run in my dad's room, saying, "Dad, it's not his fault!" while my brother is crying with a gun to his head, yelling at me, "Get out of here. "You're only making it worse!" I'd run up and tug on my dad's shirt, "Dad! No! No! No! No!" with tears running down my face. "Don't do it. It's not his fault," I remember my dad pushing me out of the room and me crying.

One day, he actually pulled the trigger. I was standing at the door. My brother moved. It only shot his arm, but sometimes I look back (and think) it could have been me and it should have been me.

Why my brother? He's now twenty-one. His arm is all right. He has to do physical therapy, but I still think it should have been me. All the times he got threatened, it was always my fault, but I tell my brother and he always says the same thing, "It's not your fault. You were young. You didn't know any better." I still think it should have been me.

-Snowflake

From The Beat: Of course it shouldn't have been you, Snowflake. And it shouldn't have been your brother, either. When a parent abuses his own children (even to the point of shooting one of them!), it's never the fault of the children, and always the fault of the parent. The job of a parent is to protect his children. Your father failed to do that, whether because of his gang affiliation or, more likely, because of his alcoholism. Where is he now? If he's still living, have you ever confronted him about his failure as a father? Have you learned lessons that you hope to apply if and when you become a parent yourself?

Streets

Being me is not easy to do, so I tell people to don't even try it. So when I see a girl, I tell her to join me so that we can get places together, ya feel me? It's real out here in these streets. People always sayin' that streets don't love you. That's right, but the people will always have love for you. The streets that you room are always going to be there, so when I hear back from my folks, I will get the news, so I hope you get what I just said.

-Mr. K

From The Beat: No, we don't really get what you said. What we see is a boy down for "his folks" who has sacrificed his own freedom, and continues to think in a way that seems guaranteed to take that freedom again and again. When does your life become as valuable to you as the lives of those you have love for?

Me And My Parents Have Changed

Me and my mom always be fighting because I get home late. She says all my friends are bad influences to me, and all the time I be getting home, like, at 10:00 or 11:00. She would be hitting me and I didn't like that, so I thought to myself, "Why is she hitting me?" So I said to myself, "If she hits me again, I'm going to leave the house." So my mom hit me, but it wasn't because I got home late. It's because she had lost some of her jewelry and she thought it was me and she hit me when it wasn't me. So I left the house and I went to my friend's house, and she let me stay there. The next day I didn't go to school and she was looking for me all night. Then she found me the next day and took me home.

And my dad had hit me once, too, and I left again, and the same thing happened — they found me the next day. But I thought to myself, "It's not worth leaving. Every time I leave, I go back home, and they are my parents. They could hit me, and I am still a little girl. I'm only barely into my teens, and I'm running away from my house." So I said to myself, "I'm not going to do that any more or talk back to my parents."

But since then, they haven't hit me or nothing. And now, when I get out of here, I'm going to change, because I'm really young and my record is bad and got too many charges and I'm going to change, because I don't wanna have my life ruined more than it is.

-Lucero

From The Beat: It sounds to us that you were wrong to come home so late (especially at your age), and to disrespect your mother's rules, and also that your parents were wrong for hitting you. But it also sounds like both you and they have changed, and that is good. You are completely right to want to get control of your life right now, while you are still barely into your teens. The longer you wait, the harder it gets. If you make the changes now that you know you have to make, you will look back in a few years and be grateful that you did.

Abused But Alive

I survived a three-year abusive relationship. He's in jail, serving fifteen years for attempted murder! After we broke up, he beat his fiancé half to death. It could've been me!

-Lady Smoke

From The Beat: Why did you put up with a little boy who beat you? We say little boy because the definition of "a man" does not include hitting his woman. So, we know he was an immature child (whatever his actual age), but we don't know how to think about you who put up with it for so long. Our advice: If anyone hits you, even one time, walk away!

Ma Style Grown, But Ma Age Is A Teen

Bein' locked up ain't the place you wanna be
I could be on the outs, countin' an' gettin' green
Yeah, ma style grown man, but ma age is a teen
An' no matter what chu think, I'ma still do ma thing
Just in case you didn't know, I'm da boss and the king
So anything you do, it gotta go through me
Even though I'm locked up, you still kno' what it be
An' when I get out, I'm a still do me

-Da Fly Gangsta

From The Beat: So you're "da boss and the king"/Yet you have to ask for everything/"Can I speak? Can I pee?"/What kind of king could that be?/That green you're countin' when you're out/Is what led you here, without a doubt/So pardon us if we say, if you keep on "doin' you," There'll come a time when this day you'll rue!

I Wish I Could Have Seen The Future

There been times when I just think about my homie, who is in San Quentin, doin' sixteen years. I just think about it, like, "Damn, it could've been me." There been times when I just stay to myself, "I wish I could've stopped him," or, "I wish I could've seen the future, a week before, to tell him what would happen." But no one got those powers. Probably the only one that got those powers is God.

-Killa K

From The Beat: We're sorry about your homie doing such a long stretch in Q. And, of course, you're right that nobody can look into a crystal ball and predict what's going to happen. At the same time, however, you do know that if you live in a certain way, chances are very high that you could end up in prison (or in the dirt). So, we can look into the future and tell you what is likely to happen to you if you keep doing the things that have brought you here. Which means that if you choose to keep doing what you're doing and you end up, like him, in prison, you can't say, "I wish someone had stopped me, or had told me what would happen." We just did.

Thank God It Wasn't Me

We used to be like sistas
What happened?
She slipped up and did me shady
Gettin' a charge for her
Then being ignored by her
What's up with that?
Fightin' to show I'm hard
That's not me
Lookin' like crap
Doin' what I gotta do
For drugs and money
That's not me
But that's her, fo' reals
Thank God she ain't my girl no more

-Nubbie

From The Beat: When you say, "Doin' what I gotta do," what does that mean? If it includes those things you describe as not you (like "lookin' like crap," or stealing for drugs) then, at least while you were doing them, it was you. We hope you mean that it isn't the "you" that you are becoming and want to be. Tell us about that "you."

Changing My Life

I'm changing my life, 'cause I'm sick of getting nowhere. My moms is stressin' and she telling me to change. I can't even walk my little brother to the park, because of rival gang members.

This shhh ain't no joke. People dying and getting locked up. I finally stopped banging for me and my family. I'm still messing up, though. For some reason trouble follows me wherever I go. I'm tryin' to get up out of here and stop all the bad shhhh. But I'ma be here for a minute. Some homies may say that I'm a dropout, but when I was banging, I was down for my shhh. I don't care what any of y'all say, I'm my own man and I make my own decisions.

-Flea

From The Beat: We think it shows real maturity to stop banging for your family, and, of course, for yourself. It shows that you can think independently. We hope that maturity and independence of thought can help you move from the path that leads you here to a new path that leads to college and to a career and to a free and prosperous life. School is the key.

If I Don't Think About It, Time Will Go Faster

It seem the time is going too slow
Just thinking when I'm getting out
And I know if I don't think about it
I'll go a little bit faster
Now it is time to go, so bye

-Kevin

From The Beat: Oh come on, Kevin. If this is the most you can give us, no wonder you're bored! Time goes fast when you're doing things. So, what are you doing? Are you reading? Are you thinking about a plan for your future that doesn't include coming back to this place? If you're just waiting for time to pass, it will pass... and it will be gone before you realize it!

The Game

I started in this game at a very young age
No time to grow up, brought up not to give a damn
Livin' in this world full of anger, hate, an' pain
Strugglin' to survive, 'an to keep me sane
I have to maintain, an' try not to lose my brain
'Cause that's how it is when you livin' up in this game
I have nothing to lose, an' everything to gain
Moving left an' right, heading to the fast lane
100 mph is the speed that I go, not givin' a damn
Always down to throw some blows
'Cause that's how we roll
I'm a madtown killa; don't act like you don't know
From such a young age, I was brought up to do my dirt
Never to be sloppy, an' always leave 'em hurt
I lost my childhood years in this game that some people fear
But this is the life I chose to live
So thanks I have to give to the homies who brought me up
And seen the shhhh I did
I'll never change my ways,
'Cause in this game I chose to play

-Speedy

From The Beat: "Nothing to lose and everything to gain?"/Isn't that a formula for life-long pain?/That "fast-lane" life has made you a slave/ Acting just the way little boys behave/How does "the game" advance your cause/Of living life lavish and breaking the laws?/Y'all bring undeserved pain to your mothers/And — by your choice — put yourself under the thumb of others.

One Experience, One Thought

You see, every time something happens to you, you gain an experience, and after that experience, you get a thought. For example, if something bad happens to you, like getting shot or jumped and you survive, you think about many things, like, "Should I go back and do something to that person that shot me? Or jumped me?" But then, if you do that, it means you still haven't learned your lesson and next time you might not survive.

-Walter

From The Beat: This piece shows that you are a thinker, Walter, and we always love thinkers in The Beat. But you need to give us something more than general rules and general advice. What we want to know is how these experiences have changed you. What experiences have you had that have caused you to think about your life, and what changes have you made, or do you plan to make, because of those experiences?

What If Momma Died?

Growin' up as a problem child, makin' momma cry
(momma cry)

Now I'm thinkin' 'bout, what if momma died?
I'd probably be on the block, smokin' trees, wastin' time
I thank God that I'm blessed, an' my momma still alive
It's the life we choose, so if you lose, you put ya'self at risk

But then, again, if you win, you won't regret what chu did

Rememba this — aim high an' keep the beat within
An' you're most likely ta succeed a betta life for ya kid
I admit I dropped out, but it don't mean I ain't keen

-Gus

From The Beat: You're plenty keen. So, if your momma died, you'd be so broken up you'd go to the block to smoke and waste time. Does that mean (we hope) that since your momma is still going strong, that you will avoid the block and smokin' and wasting time? We hope that's what it means, because you owe her at least that much.

Spoken Word To A Lost Children

In some ways the world can be so beautiful and other ways a man's worst nightmare. I used to walk down the golden streets of heaven, now I can't do nothing but watch my dream world disappear in the development of my tears. I live a life hoping for better days but at times I wonder is it just a waste of time...

To the lost children: The only reason you're lost is because you haven't been found yet. Your true identity lies in the studying of history and the mystery of the future. What you see in the mirror everyday is a reflection of a family tree but yet you don't see nothing but a leaf. That's because you're blind thinking you see.

If I told you that you possess the power of God you may think I was crazy. That's because lies has been trickled down your grandfather's backbone tainting a yet to be seen seed that will one day come to control society. You proudly carry the legacy of your forefathers but yet ignorant of its accomplishments, or better yet the blood that has been sacrificed in order to see you gain whether it was out of good or bad.

If I could go back in time and tell your forefathers that their legacy is polluted with weaklings they may laugh in my face unable to digest the naked truth that has been served raw. Or they may regurgitate the filthiness rejecting the deposit of your nefarious conduct. It seems as if your bill for tonight's rent is under paid. Or is it your ignorance has stumbled upon bankruptcy of morality and your desperate means for financial stability has prematurely birthed a disgrace. Your uncalculated conduct is leaving those around you to drown in the lake of poverty pushing their bodies into an ocean of destruction. "Let your right hand know not your left hand doeth," but it's only obvious. All these unnecessary taxes tells a story of robbery. I could have sworn I seen in the reflection of my tears in the form of sweaty visions of slavery. All this labor is leaving internal whips on my spine and Medicare refuse to give my broke ass a cut. I can't do nothing but blame myself because if you know better you'll do better, or would you?

Spoken word to my troubled youth: you must find your calling in life and run with it. There isn't anyone in this world spiritually wealthy enough to give wasted time. So you must run fast, we're running out of time and there isn't the thing on this Earth that doesn't get old including you. My beauty in life is writing and poetry and if I can't give you quality I don't want to give it to you at all. My every word to you is my all for I wouldn't feel complete if it wasn't. Experience has taught me that if you want to become

We've always had a very deep respect for this next writer, even when we first met him in our workshops in San Francisco Juvenile Hall's maximum security unit, known back then as B5. And though he's journeyed with us throughout that time, we've known him for over ten years, he never ceases to amaze us. He comes with well-thought ideas and a heart that surpasses most. This week he takes on the problems that are plaguing our youth while offering solutions. He actually closes with a very brilliant piece about how we're a reflection of our ancestors and these ancestors have bled for us to have more opportunities and some of us don't take advantage of that. Does this mean our ancestors have died in vain? Well, hopefully that's not the case because that would be a shame. There are many reoccurring ideas we get from these writings in The Beat Without section, but the one that sticks out most is the love we all have for our futures, for our youth. Which is a difficult thing to have in a capitalistic society that wants to make money off our communities and the individuals who have called them home for so long. He's writing from San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, CA, and has a good grasp on things, we hope he'll maintain that grasp for how ever long he can hold on to it.

great with something you just push yourself. You must think. You must give it your all. That's how the universal powers in this world works. The greatest disease upon mankind is laziness. Opportunity passes it up every time. In my mind I know I can have whatever I want. I also know my wants isn't going to come without a fight and possibly — a sacrifice in order to gain.

I once scrambled for the crumbs but I now I learn how to cook the cakes. My mission is to share this dream of time with the world making sure I implement this beautiful picture in my mind upon human kind with due time. It's only one thing holding me back and that's prison, but yet I still evolve. Mental, I'm nurturing this caterpillar into the form of a butterfly with every coming day. With hopes of it flying among the stars.

The majority of people that comes to prison carry a pseudo thinking accompanied with expectations of prison possessing a miraculous ability to change and build them, when it's really the other way around. You must change and build yourself because prison isn't going to do it for you. Time nowadays is a precious jewel most people do not have, yet the incarcerated is overindulged with it. Time and a brilliant mind is for sure to find you a home with success. Ignorance and too much time is a devil's workshop. If one is thinking right he/she is going to manipulate time to benefit him or her... Yeah we're currently sacrificing a lot by being in here, but most everywhere there's a sacrifice there's a gain. My question to you, "where's your gain? And what do it look like?" This is my spoken word. Care to carry on?

Devil's Advocates

I come from a wild hood to where a man's vengeance is so great that death is not enough. It's like I'm surrounded in a pit of devil's child's for dead bodies are overkilled sending an unspoken message through the ghetto of a man's hate. Their bodies dress the souls of satan possessed angels filling the shoes of a reaper destroying my godly neighborhood. In their minds it's kill or be killed and the thought of a consequence is a joke.

Our future seeds is hell sent and birthed with a devil's smile. No need to blame them it's in their blood. From the time they open their eyes they're mad at the world and don't even know why. Or maybe they're disgusted with America for making their crime black.

It's no longer white sheets it's dark hoods. Some how the KKK has colored themselves black. This new phenomenon is disastrous. If it's not the prejudice of the law, it's the pain of a bullet that's trying to take my life. I mean these young minds have no understanding, it don't matter if your vest says "thug gear" or "boys in blue" cold blood is aiming at your thinking cap and they're trying to give you a little more than just your average flu. All that peace movement put it in your back pocket and sit on it. Revelations says, "these are the last days" and they're going out with a bang. And I don't mean to get biblical, but all your prayers is rejected at heavens door and sent to the hell's invitation — for in my head we're not receiving nothing but devil responses.

That boy was picked up with his wig split back I wonder what he was thinking? I let his brains in the streets tell me about it, and

if you were ever to even stumble upon noodles not the kind you eat, walk the other way — those things says, "victim" and no this is not a fairytale this is very real — beyond some of y'all comprehension but that's O.K, lack of understanding sometimes goes that way. If you don't know how it is to eat out of a rusted spoon warning! The previous and following context is not suitable for suburbanians. I'm talking about "thugs gone wild" a crazy group that does explicit things for free. How Explicit? Things like capture your dead body in a camera phone and title it "spilled blood and wasted head"...

Yes, this is live and direct. No, this is not previous recordance don't do that! I haven't read about this. I live this and I'm here to tell you "Hunters Point" California is hell sent. A place where the price of life is purchased everyday. So put a tag on that boy's head he's going to the highest bidder. And I don't mean to sound like a meat factory and scare the shhh out of y'all, but I'm giving this game to you raw and uncut. You season it up and cook it how you want.

I'm a ghetto's witness absent of jehovas but I can use Jesus in my life. I've seen too much blood shed, then even see my own blood and I then felt the pain of this gold chain attached to this cross that's around my neck. In other words until we start taking life more serious our youth is going to take life as a game. We are their examples. We are their role models not the action figure that they see in a video game. We only have one life to live it's no press "restart", so get ready for that judgment day and don't you forget — devil's advocates is not allowed!

Relationship Problems

Writing a dialogue between couples who is having a disagreement about relatively complex problems

Nate: Angie, we need extra money, I pay all the bills, such as, food, property taxes, electric bills, phone bills, car expenses, and etc. You don't contribute enough money to this relationship. All you do here is consume and you don't produce.

Angie: Are you saying I need to get employment (Paraphrasing).

Nate: Yes, that is exactly what I mean.

Angie: it sounds like you are really furious about my lack of economic participation (reflecting feeling).

Nate: You are 100 percent right. I bust my ass as a mechanic six days a week. All you do is get high, drinking and hanging out on the streets with your fiends.

Angie: Yeah, I have been really lax in my responsibilities (validation).

Angie: What do you suggest I do? Go back to college; get on public aid; go back to selling drugs and hustling (scavenging)? (Requesting verification).

Nate: When you hang out and do nothing, in general, how can we survive as a couple with no money to pay the mounting bills (x-message).

Nate: I mean yesterday you were so busy with your friends on the streets getting high, that you didn't have time for me, so you stayed out all night (y-message).

Nate: I feel so angry, that I thought I was going to slap you (z-message).

Angie: (waited until Nate calmed down and was ready for bed) I will give you passionate kisses. (Angie and Nate become sexually involved).

Nate: Angie you are so lazy and spacey.

Angie: I am doing the best I can, making an allowance for I am depressed and life is so hard and complicated

Nate: When you get high and hang out doing nothing to help me financially, I just can not stand it (x-message).

Nate: For instance, when I first met you, you were working with a private company making 417 dollars a week, but you lost your job; it was one of your priorities (y-message)

Nate: I feel so frustrated, that is why I get physical with you. I expect more out of you (z-message).

Angie: I will try to do better. I will start looking in the classified section of the Sun Times for a real job (problem solving skills; developing positive suggestions).

Nate: (context; next week Nate discusses the issues on in-laws with Angie at dinner time) damn I hate your mother. She dissects everything I say, to imply or mean something I did not say. When we first started dating she was pleasant, but now that you have moved in with me and are talking marriage, she says things like, "Your three kids must be included." She is the one who has legal custody anyways. Your kids are her problems not mine. I mean I am very friendly with them and adore them very much. However, we don't even have enough room for three children in our small two flat, and the first floor is rented out. Who is going to pay for their expenses also? Angie you cannot even support yourself, you live off me. I pay all your expenses even your drug habit.

Angie: Are you saying my Mom is getting on your nerves bugging you about my kids (paraphrasing)

Nate: Yes

Angie: I see Mom is aggravating you again (reflecting feelings)

Nate: I am so aggravated by her so many times that I wait in the car after dropping you off to see your family on our weekly trips.

Angie: I feel that way too that is one of the reasons I moved in with you, to get more freedoms. Mom can be so controlling. I cannot live with my mother (validation).

Angie: What exactly about mom, that started us on this conversation anyway, there are a lot of issues with her. (requesting clarification).

Nate: She expects me to be not only your husband, but also the father of your kids. I mean I don't think we are that far ahead in our relationship yet. I think I do enough for you as a caregiver, especially, making sure you don't overdose on drugs plus controlling your drinking.

Angie: (avoiding global indictments Angie focuses on the way Nate makes her feel) When you blame me for the way my Mom treats you; I think that unfair to me. I am independent of her. She is doing

Some dialogues have no purpose other than to show a discussion between two people. Well, this dialogue has an extreme purpose and that's to make us aware of how we interact with the ones we love. In a relationship where the man is the provider and the woman, who has three kids prior to their relationship, has a heavy drug and alcohol problem. The struggle is between the man providing for the woman out of love, while she uses his money to support her habit. We're sure people haven't heard this type of story before. In fact many of us were raised in homes like this. But though the woman is addicted to drugs, she has a very intelligent way of dealing with the conversations she's having with her boyfriend about this. She ends up wanting to help herself as a way to salvage her relationship with him — a very noble thing to do. There are many morals lying within this dialogue and we're sure you'll be able to catch them. He's writing from the windy city, Chicago, Illinois. Thank you for changing our minds about dialogues.

it on her own (x-message)

Nate: but she is your Mom, whom else can I complain at.

Angie: As of today in this situation, it is her not me (y-message).

Angie: I feel betrayed by her. She treats you wretched. She doesn't know where her loyalty should lie; because I am with you she should treat you with respect (z-message).

Angie: (waiting until the next day to bring up the same subject, when Nate was in a better mood) I will talk to mom and explain to her why she shouldn't push you in that direction, I refer to, the incidents where she should blame you for my problems; the kids. (effective problem solving skills; developing positive suggestions).

Nate: Angie I have a problem with your alcoholism and drug abuse. It complicates our relationship; I cannot leave my wallet just laying around, I have to hide it, because you would steal my money out; you hang out at the neighborhood hooligan's like you are one of them; I pay for your drug habit in exchange for your love and affection. I am in love with you, thus feel so sorry for you, because you won't stop abusing drugs. Looking at what you are doing to yourself, it really hurts me too. I would like you to check into a drug rehab clinic. What would happen to us if you get arrested and have to go to time for possession or any drug related crime like stealing or robbery.

Angie: Do you think my drug habit and alcoholism will cause a break up? Do you still love me (paraphrasing)?

Nate: Yes, you might get arrested. In addition, you do drus and alcohol to the point of lacking cognitive and motor skills. We live in low end, a high crime and impoverished neighborhood. Therefore, any thing could happen to you; you would not have the mental presence to cope.

Angie: Nate I know you are worried about me, but I know how to take care of myself. (reflecting feelings). The catching before the hanging. I know how to beat the system at its own game.

Nate: You are involved in disorganized crime; it's all petty to feed your drug habit; boosting clothes from department stores. What ever you do sooner or later you will get busted by the cops, everybody does.

Angie: You could be right. Now that I think about it. I don't think when the cravings hit me. I lose self-control (validation).

Nate: Yes, when you lose self-control. Someone could take advantage of you. That is how your drug problem will affect us.

Angie: But if I check into a drug rehab center, I will be labeled as a drug addict on my record, which will follow me the rest of my life.

Nate: It's not like you plan to run public office and your life story is subject to scrutiny.

Angie: I am confused to what are you asking me to do. Do you want me to quit cold turkey? Or do you want me to check into a drug rehab clinic (requesting clarification).

Nate: I want you to do both; cut back on using he karchie and I want you to start drug rehab.

Angie: (because of Nate's aggressive voice and tone Angie's face turned red and she was on the brink of sobbing) O.K. I will start your right, when I start I cannot stop. Stopping is harder than starting (validation).

Nate: When you lose self control like you did last week, to the point of passing out in the streets, I felt panicky that someone will hurt you in some way (x-y-z message).

Angie: Starting today I will call 311, the non-emergency city number and get information on the locations of free rehab clinics. Plus I want you to be in charge if you see me backsliding. At least cut back on giving me money to buy drugs when I pester you about it (effective problem solving; positive suggestions).

Nate: Before you start walking, you have to make baby steps. As long as you start you are halfway done.

You Could If My Carnalito Did

In months my brother will be celebrating ten years out! The anniversary of his release from the federal joint in Florence, Colorado. Last month he came to visit me — he's been off of parole and when he was busted we use to write each other a lot. We don't talk about it now but we made a pact to each other back then.

My carnalito (little brother) had a bad habit: carga (heroin) and as a result of trying to support this habit he became a jailbird — in and out of jail, and finally the last time he was facing a grip of time for a bank robbery, but only got enough years that he could afford.

Wherever he went to — on a transfer in California or to Arizona and Colorado, our mother went to visit him. Yes, she was the only one visiting him and me. On one term he was on he was at Old Folsom when I was at New Folsom. She visited me on Saturday and him on Sunday.

She never refused any of our needs or wants and it was messed up that we had to come to the joint to see her love for us. A visit doesn't go by that I haven't seen her shed a tear or wiping her eyes dry. I'm sure it was like this when she visited my carnalito too.

We cut it up (discussed) about her suffering — a suffering caused by us. We knew she suffered more than us and we wished to ease this pain. Who wants to see their mother suffer and cry? She wouldn't go to sleep till she knew we were home and safe and think sometimes I didn't get home until 3:00AM and she had to get up, cook breakfast and go to work before 6:30AM!

My brother agreed to change when he was released. He would do his best to remain on the streets and I agreed to do the best I could to stay out of trouble in here. We made a conscious decision to change our lives for the one that brought us into this world, put diapers on us, fed us, bought us our school clothes, and visited us in prison.

No one trusted my carnalito when he got out — he'd done a lot of things he wasn't proud of and he worked hard to earn the esteem and trust from family and friends. He slowly changed his life. He's bought a pad he's still paying off, has a family, and he's a supervisor at his job with a lot of responsibility. No one today believes how much different he is or when they hear he was in prison they don't believe him.

I have a grip of love for my brother but the one that had a habit back then was a "gutter hype." He was the worst of the worst. When he was hurting he'd do what he had to kill the pain — including taking family stuff to the connection. He's made his peace with everyone but I also believe that if he could, anyone else could also.

It doesn't matter how old you are, you can change whenever you want. You can be the jailbird and come in and out of prison or you can be saying to yourself that it's over. You want to get your life together and enjoy every day of it. You'd rather have a home than a cell and you'd rather earn a decent living than working in a jail and being told what to do by the guards every step you take. Remember each step you take in life is in one direction or the other. Your decisions will reward you with the home or the cell. No one may decide for you, it's up to you. No excuses, be strong and make the right decision, be it for moms, pops, kid(s) or more importantly, for yourself!

*It doesn't matter how old you are,
 you can change whenever you want.*

We are so ecstatic to have this next great thinker back in our pages after several issues of missing in action. And you'll see why after you read the two works of art he sent for us this week. The first is a very beautiful piece about his brother and the obstacles he's had to climb to get where he is today. It really inspires us because so often we hear about people getting out and going right back, so when we hear of a man who got out and was able to flourish it brings us to tears of joy. Especially since that man is the younger brother of such an amazing heart who says, "You could if my carnalito did." And his heart doesn't stop there, for he concludes with a piece titled, "You're Just Like Your Father," where he offers his cellmate (the father in that title) some words of advice that we believe were right on time. We don't want to give the whole piece away like we sometimes do, so you'll have to read on for yourself. He's writing from Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA, and hopefully there won't be this long in the interim before we hear from him again.

You're Just Like Your Father

I have a friend, name is Joey, and a few years back he was my cellie. Recently he received a visit from his son, the first in over twenty years and I was able to be out on a visit and meet his son and at the same time I was taken back to a time in space way back then when Joey received a letter from his son letting him know that he'd gotten into in incident at school and his mother, who is remarried today, said to him "you're just like your father!"

Soon as Joey got busted he'd known they wouldn't get together due to his life of crime and infidelities. She soon married and relocated to Tennessee, his son was about three years old then. She wanted a different lifestyle and a better opportunity for her son, so she got out of dodge.

When Joey read that part in the letter, "you're just like your father!" he broke out with a big ol' smile and let me know. Apparently his son was involved in a fist fight and here was pops proud that his son stood up for his.

I had to turn the coin show and him the other side. You see, his son wrote proudly about that declaration his mother made. He was doing good up till then and it was like the fork in the road for him — would he continue doing good and learn from this or would he follow in his pop's footsteps and live in a cage one day?

I said this to Joey and asked him to carefully consider his response to his son because anything he'd say to him would influence him. Joey started to listen and I said that maybe he should tell him that he was a young man and he should make wise decisions and not allow anyone to pressure or influence him into doing anything that wasn't in his well being — interest. That he wished his son would make wiser decisions and not allow anyone to ever cloud or contaminate his thoughts.

To let him know though he had his father's looks and mannerisms he still had a choice in this future — his future would be steered only by him.

If we look all around us we see brothers, sisters, cousins, and children of prisoners busted too. Whether we wish to admit it or not people are always looking at us and listening to us — especially our younger brothers, sisters, and cousins, and our children! We don't wish any of them to ever fall into this abyss so we should be aware of what we say and do because they are impressionable and they seek our love and respect — esteem. And if we're honest with ourselves I'm sure we all agree that education is the key not only to the future but to our chains. The only way they may advance in life without any fear is with an education and positive nurturing. Let them know that they can learn from our experiences. They are at the fork in the road so let 'em know not to follow you and to go the other way.

Joey's son is becoming a fireman in Tennessee. Joey is very proud of his son and that he has broken the chains. He is "like his father," and he made a decision to lead a different lifestyle. I don't know if Joey remembers that letter or our conversation and I wonder of the outcome of his son's life was a result of Joey's response — I sure hope so.

Everyone passing away while I'm stuck in this hole I dug for myself. I look out and see the world and the sky but I can't touch it.

Alive In An Unclosed Grave

I often wonder why I can't go to my family's funerals. It seems wrong to be denied the final goodbyes that I owe those that go before me. My great grandma and grandpa. Everyone passing away while I'm stuck in this hole I dug for myself. I look out and see the world and the sky but I can't touch it. Meanwhile all around my family grows its branches my friends get married. And I sit in my hole. What a waste of a life. Sometimes I wish someone would bury me already so I can tell Jesus thanks for the second chances and I'm sorry. But it doesn't go that way. Never does. Nothing goes exactly like you think it will. Or wish it. So sit I will. The longest sit a man can endure in his life. Waiting to get buried is all I've got left. I'll wait and wait...

Hoping that soon this torture will end in hopes fulfilled. No more sorrow, no more longing, no more soul suppressing limitations, no more sighs, no more being dead inside. Just a sense of peace and forgiveness and overwhelming acceptance. For now though, I look at what I can't touch and hope for it all to get better.

Being a man of Christian dogmatic belief, even I am not immune to the effects of morbid expression. But true power lies not in doing but in not doing. But doing is much harder for a man to control. This is where strength from faith can help us. Just believe.

Faith In Forgiveness

Faith is a distant reach for those who don't know what it is. Never in my past have I had faith in any one thing except my selfishness. But now that I've come face to face with this unsettling reality, faith is looking closer within reach everyday. But there is yet still the guilt cemented in my memory to keep me in self-chastisement for what evil came about with my own will. How could such an ugly demon rear itself from the depths of my frustration? How could one child be led to think that evil is a possibility in life? Have we no shame in showing what evil looks like to the next generation only to have them recognize it in themselves later in life.

My guilt is not in being aware and staying away from evil but being aware of it and giving my hope into its power. That demon took my hope, took my life, took my honor, and pride and burned them up into ashes. And the unsettling reality is it was of my own free will to go there. Now it is a regret of a wasted life and sorrow for the need of another that resurrects my hope, my life, into a righteous power of faith. A faith of forgiveness and understanding. A faith for second chances. A faith of strength. Even here there is life, though it's not ideal, but life it still is. So I make the best of the worst and recognize my mistakes and move on.

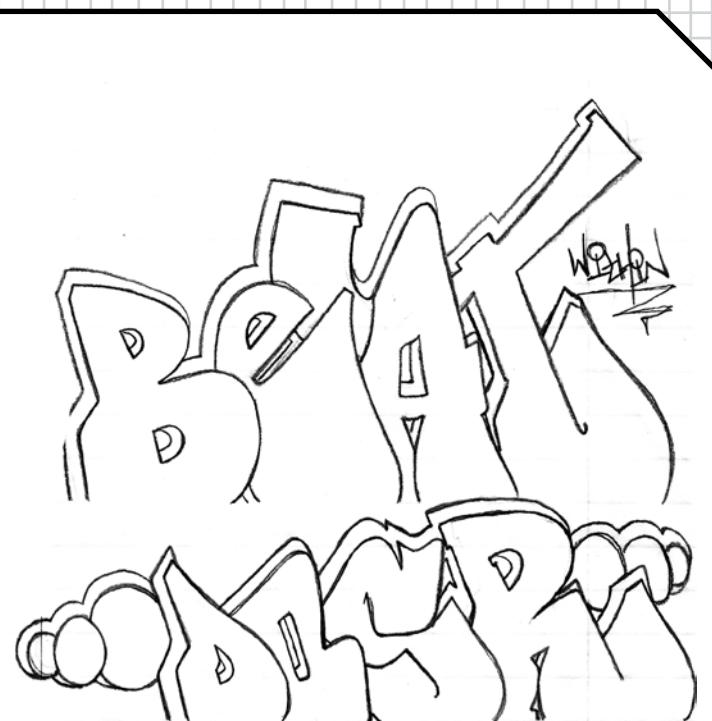
Hoping against all hope for that eternal forgiveness into a new life.

Some people believe that the spirit of a man is strengthened by the struggles he's had to endure. If this is so, people who rarely struggle have a weak spirit compared to those who've had to overcome harsh circumstances. And in life there aren't many circumstances harsher than that of incarceration. Not only that but ever since we met this man through paper, with his powerfully memorable autobiography "Conflicted," we've learned that his heart is enormous. He always makes us think with the way he strings words together. His ideas and ways of expressing them are brilliant and we are so happy that he trusts us with his most intimate thoughts. Thank you Jeremy! We first met Jeremy when he was a weekly contributor in our Beat writing workshops in Santa Cruz County. Today he writes us from Corcoran State Pen, in Corcoran, CA.

Need

As I look out my window beyond the threshold of my confinement I stare upon the distance of the world beyond my reach and illusive to my sight. It is only in great faith do I hold in my heart a hope of a better life for those that share my fate. What more could I wish upon another man than his salvation? What could I hold against another man unforgiven in his trespasses? No, that is not the way to enlightenment or life. Holding within our desires to be fulfilled with the strength of my will that weaken its strength when pressed upon with great iniquity. There in lies no salvation. Nothing lives in the darkness of the hearts of men there the lonely despairing souls cry in the world of lost hopes and dreams. Men shattered by their mistakes clinging to the knowledge of strength from fear. Playing off each other's greed to gain what they can't hold onto. It is a decay that eats away at our wisdom, our faith and our honor. Until the day comes that we have gone beyond the point of return.

So here, in prison I stand. Seeing all and giving warning to my testimony that all is not lost and that a great power came to give us that second chance. To live, to love, and to have the peace of salvation and in the promises of a better life to come. Thank the lord for his sacrifice and fall not to evil but stand in righteousness for his names sake. God Bless



People

People are gonna be people
 So I'm writing this epic poem about the street,
 And why so many people end up in jail
 Or a miserable prison cell.
 Young kids who are raised in the hood,
 In areas infested by drugs
 Before long their living the lives of street thugs.
 Selling ecstasy, heroin, or cocaine
 Trying to stay ahead of the game.
 Young women walking the street selling their souls
 For drugs, money, and material things.
 In a world that can be extremely cold
 Young brothers sporting platinum, with mouths full of gold
 Our great leaders don't care about nothing
 But that almighty dollar bill
 Allowing wholesale killings!
 Calling it war, and war is a very sad story
 Men killing men seeking GLORY!
 Turning their backs to the war right here in the United
 States
 Supplying tons of heroin, and cocaine
 To control many women an men's fate!
 Sending them to prison each and everyday
 Placing millions on probation, knowing they'll soon violate.
 Department Of Corrections is a multi-billion dollar industry
 Even in the courtroom's they have symbols
 That say IN GOD WE TRUST!
 As you can see it's all about the dollar bill
 Our politician's making laws to send you to prison at will.
 Three strikes for driving intoxicated
 You're headed to prison or placed on probation!
 We all know alcohol is sold legally
 The judicial system is playing extremely sleazy!
 These are the people who enforce the law
 And the minority is paying the cost!
 Our kids start out at a very young age
 Only to find themselves in a cold lonely grave,
 Or a Prison bed! Over the years it's become a revolving door
 As young girls become street whores!
 For drugs, money, or material things
 This is reality, and not a dream
 I've witnessed young kids sleeping on street corners
 Being left in this cold world all alone!
 Cause of the drug's that's sending so many parents to the
 grave
 Or finding themselves locked in a cage
 Nothing less than modern day slavery.
 So all you kids who's locked in the "hall," And detention
 centers Educate yourselves and become winners!
 Cause you kids are the future
 We as adult's is a part of history
 What the future holds remain a mystery.
 As I sit behind these prison gates
 My mind and heart drifts out to you kids all across the
 nation. Expressing myself through the power of words
 A brother who's heart is full of love.
 Everybody is seeking money and power
 As crime rate continues to go up by the hour!
 We must come together as a whole
 Showing our neighbors unconditional love
 In a kind word, gentle touch or smile
 Bringing joy and happiness into someone's life.
 We must stop hating one another
 And come together regardless of skin color
 People are people, bad and good
 In white society, AND THE HOOD!

Damn, this is a Beat Without section to remember and this next writer just adds to spark. He sends us three poems, all of which are outstanding, and worth many readers. The first, "As I Look Into The Mirror," is a beautiful introspective poem about what he sees when he looks into the mirror. And we can tell he's really been thinking about this because each word reflects deep thought and extreme attentiveness. The second, "People," brings us all together as one race — the human race. And no matter what your background is, how much money you've got, or what language you speak, there will be both bad and good people from those demographics. So to punish mainly one ethnic background or economic class is wrong. In fact, it just reaffirms the faults of such a vast "justice" system. We really liked how he ended that poem, "People are people, bad and good. In white society, and the 'hood." We can't stress enough how true that is. And last but certainly not least, is a poem personifying crack cocaine. He writes as though he is the drug and speaking to those of us who choose to use it. It's one of those drugs that have destroyed individuals, families, and even whole communities. In fact, many of us are lining our pockets because of it, so when it's put as blunt as he put it, we can't help but take some time to think about it. Cecil West writes us from the Washington Correctional Institution in Chipley, Florida.

*I realize, I was never free
 Using dope, and running the streets.*

As I Look Into The Mirror

As I look into the mirror this is what I see
 A middle aged man looking back at me.
 Honey colored skin, with dark brown eyes
 Sparkling with the joy of being alive.
 Even though I'm trapped behind these bars
 It won't change the fact, I got love in my heart.
 For all the people in this cold, cold world
 Women, men, boys, and girls
 Now as I smile at my own reflection
 I must admit I have no regrets
 Of a past that's filled with heartache and pain
 And tear's that fall like the pouring rain.
 It's made me the man that I am today
 A strong individual who's locked in a cage,
 Full of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding
 If I can't touch your heart, than nobody can.
 I never knew my mother or father,
 They left me as and infant, as if I was a bother;
 Street people adopted me at a very young age
 Most of them are now in their graves.
 But they left me behind to carry on
 Before I leave this earth,
 their names will be carved in stone!
 A true monument for all they did
 Showing me love when I was a kid,
 Teaching a lost young brother how to survive
 If it wasn't for street people, I wouldn't be alive.
 As I look into the mirror with these painful thoughts
 Trapped in this cage, cause I broke the law,
 Now I realize, I was never free
 Using dope, and running the streets.
 Been shot, stabbed, and in some bloody fights
 Always for what I considered was right.
 Never paid attention to a sunrise
 As the day came alive with clear blue skies.
 Even neglecting a beautiful sunset
 As it falls towards the earth orange and red,
 Listening to the sparrows chirping their songs
 Touching my heart, removing my loneliness,
 Even though they got me locked in this cage
 I must smile at this image, of my handsome black face.
 Thanking God for freeing the chains
 Of drug addiction, smoking crack cocaine!

I Am Your Man

I am your man
 My name is crack cocaine.
 Created by satan to control many women and men fate.
 I'll have you doing things that once seemed impossible
 Degrading things that's horrible selling your body for cash
 or crack
 Yeah baby I'm the mack
 I'll have you walking the street selling your soul
 I must admit I'm extremely cold,
 My job is to destroy this world
 And all the women, men, boys, and girls.
 I'm extremely evil
 Take one hit of me, and I'll give you a fever
 Seeing thing's that's not there
 And I really don't care.
 I got women selling their young daughter's
 As I sit back listening to them holla!
 From the pain
 As their pounded over and over again!
 Women even sell the kids food
 Hanging out in the slums of the hood.
 Being used and abused
 This world better realize I can't lose.
 I'll cause a man to sell his manhood,
 Something he could never get back
 For cash or a hit of crack!
 They say money is the root to all evil

I'm here to make you all out of true believers.
 ME and my cousin crystal meth
 Sometimes I wonder which one of us is the best.
 Most say I'm the best high
 Cause I make them catch AIDS and die!
 I even got women walking in the rain
 Having sex with many men!
 Listen to me!
 Crack cocaine I'm speaking loud and clear
 I'm the one you need to fear!
 Stay away from me, I mean you no good
 Look at the destruction I'm causing in the hood.
 I'm spreading myself around the nation
 Sending thousands to prison, with millions on probation.
 As you can see it's a terrible scene
 It's reality and not a dream.
 Ask the ones who's been there
 The stories they tell is like a nightmare!
 So wake up before it's too late
 I'm the one who'll send you to your grave!
 Think of all the times I've sent you to jail
 How you bail!
 Going back and forth
 Living the lifestyle of a crack whore!
 Male and Female
 I'll make your life a living hell.
 Sometimes you'll think you're going insane
 It's because of me, Crack Cocaine!

*Stay away from me, I mean you no good
 Look at the destruction
 I'm causing in the hood.
 I'm spreading myself around the nation
 Sending thousands to prison,
 with millions on probation.*

ALEX SHELTON

There are few minds as expressively magnificent as Alex Shelton's, so we're always happy to publish his work. This week he hits us with a poem titled "G Dictatorship" where he again challenges the lifestyle of those who continue to stay involved in gangs. We understand that there are many circumstances, situations, and experiences that lead up to that, but we also understand that sometimes gang involvement just makes those things worse. Sometimes we must ask ourselves, "Is what I'm doing making my life better?" And if not, that what are we living for. Instead of the advancement of ourselves as individuals, which then projects on to our people, we are focused on the deterioration of ourselves as individuals, which also projects on to our people. Alex makes this very clear in his poem. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA.

This Dictatorship

Chapter one: first comes membership,
 Then the "G" dictatorship
 Fuzzy notions of the final chapter,
 The whole gang groundwork is laid-out, knuckle-up
 Buckle-up elected to ride with the gang machine,
 Do you see a flash of power shining across the screen
 The dirty green! Is never clean!
 Never a week goes by without crisis
 Spent shells and razor slices
 Faces marked undercover K9's parked
 You say, "oh well" and these "K9s" are scooping-up "Gs"
 From the outside world just to fill up another cell.
 Looking sour
 God warned, "And I will break the pride of your power"
 It's all in the writing
 Leviticus 26:19
 God will not be mocked. He will have his day
 Who wants blessings in play?
 A smart man would know what to say!
 Essentially, some "Gs" are born into controversy,
 Or raised on the warfare, then grown into tough-battle-
 happy "Gs" Everyone wants to be the ruler, SQUAD-

LEADER,

The mob-boss, or possessing the shiny jingling keys,
 Itching, like a dog, but can't shake the jumping fleas
 From sucking out your blood!
 Like a drunk falling in the mud,
 Headaches and hangover's, put a ban on the can
 Along with Satan's clan his demons will be your fan
 Buzzword "your life ain't a crossword,"
 Like fumbling with words for entertainment
 If time allows read the new testament
 Instead of pulling triggers, and punching faces,
 Exercise fingers flipping pages
 Remember the wages of sin is death
 A better reception can help one to see a clean picture
 About what Jesus Christ accomplished on earth
 From death to birth!
 Your life ain't like Hollywood with special effects
 And big screen actors who they make out to be
 Unstoppable heroic, or out of this world
 Stay home long enough for RATED
 PG So a "G" won't be stuck with
 A gangs dictatorship chronology
 R-RATED/SL-RATED/V-RATED/
 "D"-FLATED

Lets Make Those Difficult Conversations Easier

We all have had them: difficult conversations with our friends, supervisors, colleagues, or employees. These are the ones you often either avoid or reactively launch into, thus making them even more difficult!

Here is what we have found to be effective. First, acknowledge that there is a difficult conversation you need to have. Second, honestly clarify your intention or goal for the conversation. If you want to show the other person where he or she is wrong, or to prove that you are right, or to scare or intimidate the person, or to simply get your way, or to assert your authority, please wait. It is likely that you will make a difficult situation is worse. However, if you want to show a problem, find out what the other person needs or wants, get his or her cooperation, maintain the relationship, or open up possibilities, please continue to the next step.

Third, get ready to listen, if you think the conversation is going to be difficult for you, it will probably also be difficult for the other person. So, prepare yourself to listen to what the other person will say.

Check your understanding of what the other person said by paraphrasing or summarizing the key points and reflecting his feelings. For example, "your primary are... and you feel hurt by... have I got that right?" Also use open-ended questions to increase your understanding of the other's perceptions. You could say, "How do you see the situations?"

You will be amazed at how a single desire to understand will ease the difficulty. If you don't think you will be able to do this, ask for the help of a skilled third party from inside or outside your organization.

Fourth, choose the right time and place. Avoid having a difficult conversation if you or the other person is short on time. Find a neutral place where you will not be interrupted. The sooner you talk, the less time you will need.

Fifth, separate what you have seen from what you infer. What you can see is behavior. You make inferences about the behavior. Your inferences become real for you. It may not be real or true for the other person.

For example, one of your employees give you a financial report later than requested. That is the behavior. You might infer that the employee does not care about the job, does not respect you, and is really just a "Ne'er do well."

Here's the truth. All you know is that she gave the report to you later than requested. Only the employee understands her intention and what happened on her end.

Only you understand the impact of getting the report

A clown has to look happy on the surface all the time, regardless what's going on inside. The clown could be really hurting inside and yet still have to wear a smile on its face. Well, this next writer uses that idea of a clown and compares it to his own life. And it made for an incredible poem. And although the poem is amazing, we really like his second poem, which is basically informing us (the readers) on how to have quality conversations, even when you don't necessarily want to talk to the person. Incredible ideas that flow through the hand of a more incredible writer, we are grateful to know Juan, and we hope you will be too. He's writing from San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, CA.

later than you hoped. So, focus the conversation there and avoid making up and acting on your stories about what she intended.

Sixth, manage your feelings. This aspect may be the most challenging and most critical. Managing your feelings does not mean denying or repressing them. It does mean taking responsibility for them and expressing them skillfully. Here is what that might sound like, "I feel hurt and angry." Not, "You obviously don't care about this business or respect me (inference)." Or, one of our personal favorites, "You make me mad." Please note that the skillful expression of feelings starts with "I" and the least effective with "You."

Seventh, ask for what you want or need in as specific and concrete terms as you can and why it is important to you. For example, "I need you to give me the report at the time I request. This enables me to more quickly and effectively make decisions to keep this business solvent."

Eighth, express appreciation. This could be for the person's skills, actions, qualities, or impact on your business. For example, "I appreciate how quickly you respond to customers inquiries with clear and concise answers. This helps keep our customers loyal to us."

Ninth, look at your part in creating the need for the difficult conversation. Have your request or instructions been clear? Were they given at a time and place in which your employee could understand them and ask clarifying questions? What was your tone of voice? Angry or impatient? You may have unwittingly intimidated or frightened the person. Fear tends to diminish anyone's ability to understand and think clearly.

Tenth, schedule regular checks to make sure the situation stays on track. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of difficult conversations. These could be biweekly for 10 minutes. For example, "How are we doing? Anything need to be clarified or resolved?"

If you follow these steps, we think you'll be pleased with the outcome. And with that said I conclude thank you all for your time and understandings.

The Tears Of A Clown

Now if there's a smile upon my face
It's only there trying to fool the public;
Now honey that's quite a different subject.
Don't let my glad expression give you the wrong
impression;
Really I'm sad,
Oh, sadder than sad, like a clown, I pretend to be glad.

Now there's some sad things known to man
But ain't too much sadder than
The tears of a clown
When there is no one around.

Oh yeah, baby
Now if I appear to be carefree,
It's only to camouflage my sadness;
In order to shield my pride

I try to cover this thirst with a show of gladness
But don't let my show convince you
That I've been happy since you decided to go,
I need you so, I'm hurt and I want you to know,
But for others I put on a show.

Just like Pagliacci did
I try to keep my sadness hid,
Smiling in the public eye
But in my lonely room I cry
The tears of clown

Oh, yeah baby!
Now, if there's a smile on my face
Don't let my glad expression
Give you the wrong impression
Don't let this smile I wear
Make you think that I don't care.

The Lord, Peter And Me!

One day I was just chillin' in the hood at homie Bird's house, you know the usual was going on, homies shooting dice arguing who hit or missed their point, the hood rats trying to look ghetto fabulous and attract the homies with the most money. I'm leaning up against the wall looking toward the sky, letting the sun hit my light brown face, thinking deeply what would Jesus Christ (Yashua) be doing if he was here in this hood or better yet in the 21st century. Then all of the sudden I hear a horn honk three times, which snapped my train of thought. And a Barry White voice said, "Bird, where's BB at?" that got my attention cause that's me y'all. So I looked intently at the direction of the voice and it was a Navigator all white with a clean paint job. I swear looking at this ride almost blinded me, it was like it was from heaven or something. Then Bird pointed to me and I was immediately drawn to this guy.

As I got in the passenger side of the Navigator, the Barry White voice said, "Get in BB," I said, "Who are you Lord?" He said, "Thou have said it and don't try to fight against the Holy Ghost cause my two angels will put you in the car." Without another word I got in, and boy was this ride off the chain inside, it was like I stepped from darkness to light. There was gold, diamonds and pearls all around, with oh so plush interior and man was the music banging, a song called, "Heaven Must Be like This," I was in a complete daze and sat back in my seat and put my seat belt on as I watched the Lord motion for me to do so before he pulled off. I heard Bird say, "B when you coming back?" I was about to say I don't know when the Lord said three days, with a glorious, thunderous laugh. And with that I was up and out of the hood.

Now that I am shell-shocked I turn and look directly at the lord with his long curly wool hair, like mine, trimmed beard and nice dark brown complexion with golden eyes of fire. I said, "So what do I call you? Where are we going?" "You can call me Yashua (Jesus) or Ya for short. And we are going through your life to have some fun cause I ain't been down here in ages. Oh I know you're wondering why I came so quickly for you? Well I have a mission I need you to do and only you can do it. And if you choose not to do it remember for my sake you will be persecuted but I need you to have joy because I have overcome the world."

Now after he said all that I thought I was tripping because I heard a voice from the back say, "Yo Yashua, turn into that Fat Burgers joint right there." Ya said, "Peter, You just ate angel food," but Peter said, "Yes no complaints in that department because we're always full but the last time we were down here all we tasted was fish. You said we could live it up for the three days and nights so lets get it popping!" Ya said, "Alrite I feel ya! We ain't going to be holier than thou." Then I said, "Yashua where did Peter come from?" Ya said, "He was hear just listening, you know being swift to listen and slow to speak, slow to wrath." Peter said, "Yeah B I haven't always been this way." And Yashua said, "That's why I brought him along instead of coming solo because you two are a lot alike. Peter used to be rebellious until he seen my glory and allowed me to lead him. I couldn't say anything because I was guilty as sinned, but the Lord knowing my thoughts said I already paid the price and you are forgiven son."

We hopped out the Navigator and immediately females and guys who knew me started saying what it do BB, cause "I'm a hood star" I spoke back to everyone who spoke to me and watched as the Lord and Peter showed kindness to everyone and gave encouraging smiles. The Lord said, "It's good to speak to those who speak to you but its even better to show love to those who don't show you love." I was amazed at this teaching because he led by example. Now that's a good teacher I thought to myself.

We ordered our food and ate inside Fat Burgers. There was a bum outside asking everyone for something to eat but no one would respond so the Lord caught wind of this and invited the bum to eat with us, he even went and ordered him another round of burgers and fries with a Sprite. The bum said thank you, the Lord said thank you my father in heaven he cares for you no matter what condition you are in. After we ate the Lord bought the bum some clothes, gave him some money and took him to a motel to get cleaned up. Once he was cleaned up the Lord told him now that you are cleaned up allow my father to keep you that way, ask and it shall be given, knock and the door will be opened.

Lately this next writer has been really consistent with his writing. We think he's been published in at least the last three issues and he still has more to come next week. But let's not get ahead of ourselves because this week he hits us with two spiritually awakening pieces. The first, "I've Changed For Better," maps out how he's changed for us. From where he's been, to where he's at now, and also to where he's going, his soul shines through his handwriting and now through The Beat Without publication. And then he concludes with a very creative piece about how Jesus and Peter came to his hometown to take him on a journey. They played Playstation 2, went to the club, and even had burgers. And with each event people felt the healing power of Ya. It says a lot about how people only choose to worship a God when he's right in front of your face — either literally speaking or figuratively speaking. Meaning when we are going through hardships, that's when we're most inclined to search for a higher power. However, when we're flying high (ironic as it is) we forget about searching for a God because we feel like we don't need one at the moment. This kind of hypocrisy is sickening to some and a way of life for others. Nasir reflects this fact with brilliance. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA.

Then he said you may go, you're healed in your heart and your sins forgiven. Wow I was amazed again.

Now off to my house we went, which was on the east side of San Bernardino, we got to my house and the Lord said nice house with a smile on his face. And without hesitation me, Peter and the Lord went inside. The Lord was tired so I offered him my bed and Peter wanted to play PS2 with the latest game out. The Lord made a joke before he dozed off, he said you know what they say a saint ain't no earthly God after he eat. I started laughing cause that's a joke the homies and me always say after we eat but it is more explicit than that.

You know my house was clean but while the Lord was asleep and Peter played PS2 I felt the need to throw out the stash of weed, my gun and the porno flicks I had in there. When the Lord awoke he said, "It's good you threw that stuff away but you have to clean out your heart because if those things are in your heart you'll just go get them again after I'm gone." Man I couldn't believe how I was changing right in front of his eyes but the glory goes to God!

Yashua said, "What are we going to do for fun?" And I said, "Go to a club and get our party on." So I took the Lord and Peter to a cool little club where everybody be getting their serious dance on. We got there the music was bumping in a real way and I could feel the heat in the air, the line was so long it was crazy, but one of the security guards said, "Yashua, I got you, your party of three come on up." And just like that we were searched and let into the hottest club in town. We even got the only V.I.P. section that night, and the weird thing was Snoop Dogg and Ice Cube were up in the club before us. But I guess when your rolling with the Lord its V.I.P. all the time, I can get used to being with the Lord. Man homeboy did we turn the game, I mean the club upside-down that night, the Lord had everyone shouting hallelujah right on the dance floor. A few people were even crying but they said they were tears of joy because they'd been set free from a lifetime of pain and sorrow and they could live to tell about this experience tomorrow, Lord willing! Ah man I'm telling you that club was a trip that night, you had almost every person in that club sober and there was no freaking going on, in fact females was doing their best to cover up their hoochie mama mini skirts and tank tops. Man and the guys was pulling up their pants and tucking in their shirts taking hats off. But the craziest thing was all the guns, weed, condoms, cigarettes, and even the morning after pill was left at the door.

On the way out of the club the D.J played "Stomp" by Kirk Franklin and you could hear folks saying, "It ain't over" and "We are going to have a Holy Ghost party in here." Man the security who had let us in said, "Jesus I knew you'd turn it out and I'd been expecting you since you last visited me over a year ago." Ya said, "You be keeping yo house clean and walking straight?" The guard said, "You know this man," Ya said, "Yes I do my brother," and they both started laughing and saying thank you Father. But when we got to the parking lot there was one big ol' revival going on, I'm talking 2:00 in the morning y'all. It blew me away because people was praying, singing, dancing, and hugging all in the name of the Lord. The San Bernardino police department was there deep but they had took off they billy clubs and guns and was getting saved, I said Lord the Holy Spirit is powerful tonight. He said it always is people just came to the right place Amen. I

say Amen!

The funny but good thing that happened that night is the police officer who had crippled my baby brother a year before, walked up to Jesus Christ and said Lord I've sinned and done some terrible things forgive me, he said my son you are forgiven and sin no more. And the Lord turned to me and said your prayer has been answered your brother Timothy is healed. He said pull out your cell phone and call the hospital, you want to do it anyway, so I dialed Timmy's room number at San Bernardino's hospital and a lady picked up the phone on the first ring. I said hello, don't mean to disturb you but she cut me off and said Timothy has been healed and it's a miracle, and then I heard cheering and things going on in the background. Timothy hopped on the phone all excited and out of breath and said big bro I have been healed God is so good. You could just hear the joys and smiles in his voice. I was into a real tear party when the Lord said give all your glory to the father, and that's what I did.

Well we ended up doing all sorts of stuff together again on the second day; we went to the movies, the skating rink, and the mall and of course the Orange Show. The Lord even talked to my girlfriend Rene who wanted a baby bad, so bad she used to put holes in the condoms without me knowing it and wouldn't take birth control. Now she doesn't want a baby until we are married, and she does want us to get married before we have sex again. I'm cool with that gotta do right by the Lord. Man people couldn't stop following us neither and the Lord didn't turn anyone away, he was just so gentle and patient but most of all loving. I sure picked up some tips from him in all those areas.

Man we even flew to Hawaii and Jamaica and went swimming in their clear oceans, oh so many people got baptized it was beautiful. People calling their loved ones all around the country telling them they need to make it so they could have an encounter with the Lord. The Lord would remind them that all they have to do is call him up anytime and he'd be right there to come in and dine with them. Once again you could hear and feel the Holy

Spirit moving so powerful it was beautiful. Some couples even got married right there in the ocean by the Lord, what a beautiful ceremony.

When we got back to San Bernardino on the third day all we kept hearing about was all the peace taking place in that city, people were getting rid of guns like it was crazy and dope was being flushed and burned up like 90 going north. Man the government wanted to know what was going on, Jesus Christ it's a Holy Ghost party and it ain't over. They were mad cause no violence of any kind had taken place in three days, except an old man got mad at a teenage girl for putting onions on his hamburger only because he is allergic to onions. Other than that it was peaceful.

Ya said, "Alright BB, you gotta do right by our Father in Heaven because you got the blood running through your veins so serve him while you can." He told me my mission was to feed his sheep and help save the youth not only in San Bernardino but also in America. He said I gave you the Holy Ghost and a sword which is the word of god and that's all you need to do the work of the Father. And with that being said he gave me a Holy Kiss on the neck and Peter too, next thing you know they were gone just like they came.

I was back in the hood on Colorado St, where it all started. Homies was coming up to me and homegirls like man you got a glow we want what you got BB, and I'd start ministering to them just like Jesus Christ showed me.

This is dedicated to my friend Pumpkin, she resting in peace and get to see me change but I know she looking down from heaven smiling on her baby boy saying that's right you's a man now finally put childish ways behind you. And to all the Beat readers, know this change is possible no matter where you at in life, you just gotta want to. And when you do pants will start coming up and frowns will turn into smiles they might win a showing their teeth in contest. Change can do wonders if you let it, go for it!

I've Changed For Better

I've changed no longer want to kick it with the homies and do dirt or see someone else hurt, what's it worth? I've changed!

I entered prison as a boy with a mind full of toys not knowing the joys of life truly offered if I just took it one day at a time, instead of hollering I'ma get mine! But yeah now the courts got there's so it ain't funny. I've changed.

I no longer blame others for what happened to me in life but instead take full responsibility for my actions, not allowing no faction to make a choice or decision for me. I'm a man now gotta stand on my own two feet. I've changed.

I used to laugh at what I didn't understand; now I seek to understand what I don't know. I realized that everyone won't go where I'm trying to go, cause some individuals like being stuck in the mess. Only time I'm looking down on ya' is when I'm trying to pull ya up. Otherwise an individual shouldn't say nothing. I've changed.

I've learned to appreciate women and not just what is between their legs because sex is overrated without true love and marriage. If I wouldn't want it for myself, I dang sure don't want it for her. Women are our queens and we're (men) supposed to be their kings, not pimps, beaters and so on and so fourth. I know that the truth hurts but go on and feel it! Cause lord knows you'll miss a good thing when it's gone. I've changed for real.

I've learned to truly be thankful for today because I don't know what tomorrow will bring, plus I may not live tomorrow. So I gotta live today like its my last day on Earth and leave no stones unturned as I let individuals in my life know I love them from the heart. I've changed.

I no longer think getting revenge is the sweetest joy next to getting -----. But instead look for ways to show love and turn my head away from a negative. Sometimes it's hard but I let god fight my battles cause vengeance belongs to him plus what we sow we reap. I've changed.

It's no longer all about me and my wants (desire) because there's a burning fire inside me who wants to give all I get to others and show them change is possible. Change is not an overnight thing, just like Rome wasn't built in a day, it takes time. I've changed.

I used to have a nasty attitude, that's why they called me Nasty because being nice wasn't me, 'till one day God changed all that and said that wasn't who he created me to be. So now I smile and do my best to show a humble and gentle spirit even when I'm going through something. I know storms don't last always. I've changed.

I used to not care about what others thought one way or another but now I care in a positive way and will take and accept constructive criticism from whomever. I've changed.

What I'm saying is the old me don't live in the house you see because all the old things have been moved out and new furniture put in. It don't mean sometimes I don't want to pick up that old furniture and act a fool but I gotta remember that's not me no more, it's a new guy here. I've changed y'all for real. Thanks be to God.

If I can change anyone can change, just keep pushing until you start to notice the good reactions you get from people regarding your behavior and actions. Life is too short to be hanging on to things we can't do nothing with or turn ourselves into a better person.

Brighter Days

To The Striving Youth

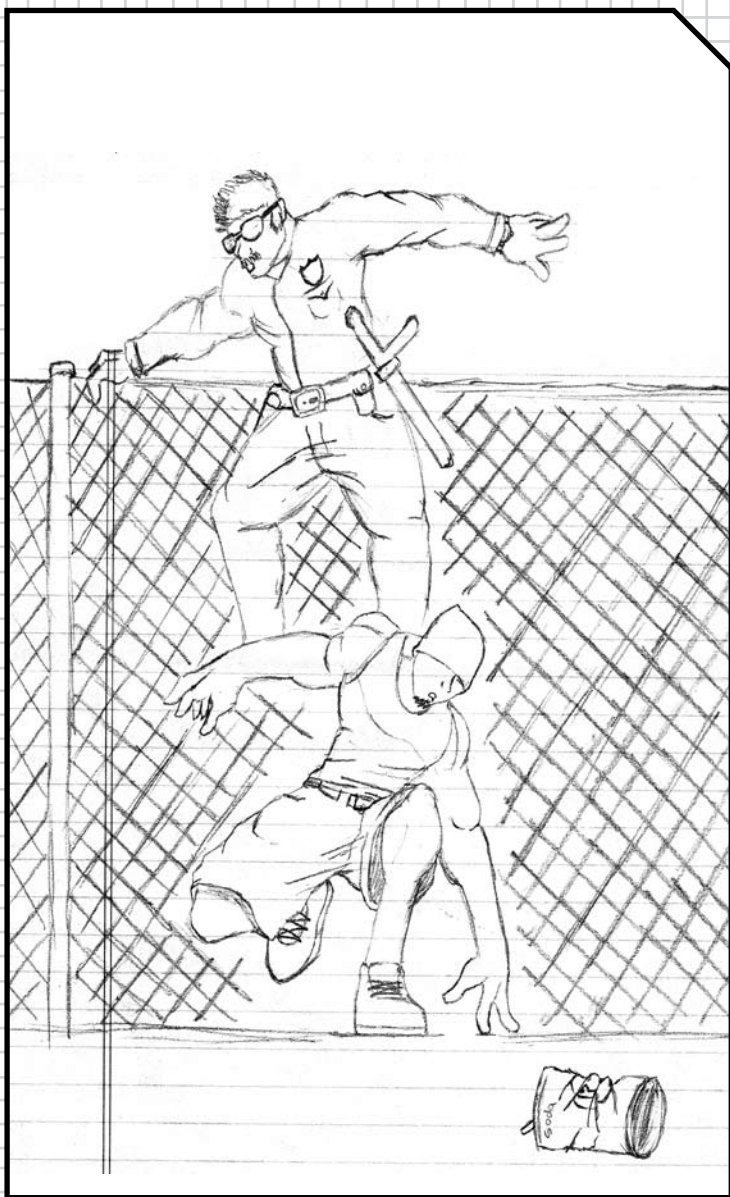
Today is the day that we truly take a look at the choices we made to put us where we are. It might be juvenile hall, California Youth Authority, or The Beat Within Workshop. But if you are hearing these words today, that means you have a chance. A lot of you might be thinking, "I keep making the same mistakes because that's all I got coming." But that's not true. If you believe in yourself, push yourself and keep telling yourself, "I refuse to let my past be my future." You see, my name is Keith and I was born in East Palo Alto. As a youth, I spent most of my childhood in juvenile hall and Camp Glenwood Boy's Ranch, all the time trying to prove that I was tough. But I didn't want anyone to know my true dreams so I kept on acting like it didn't mean anything to me because my peers in the hall always were saying it was going to be all right. We would only have to sit in juvenile hall for a week or two and then we would get out. I would try my best not to do the same things that I did the last time to get locked up. I saw brighter days for

This next writer's heart never stops pumping for the younger generation. It never fails. Every time we publish work from him it's always to the younger generation, almost pleading with them not to follow in his same footsteps. It takes a man of courage and utter wisdom to realize that the path he chose could've been a better one and that people probably don't want to follow. There's not too much compassion in the world so when we witness some, we cling to it like it's the thing to do. We can't put it the way he put it, so we'll just open the floor to him.

awhile and even got back into school, but then made more bad choices.

There's more to life than living in the system as a result of making bad choices. We have to take control of our life and learn from the mistakes we made. There is nothing wrong with wanting to square up because if it keeps you out of here then I say be square in a cool way by helping a friend start to believe in himself and that will help you believe in yourself. Today I believe in myself and I'm in a prison cell doing what it takes to better myself today. You can start doing the same where you are today.

Remember, anything the mind can believe, the mind can achieve. Keep your head up. There will be brighter days.



*As I lay in my cell remembering the good times,
 I think of what you would be doin'
 in this day in life,
 But to calm myself down I just say you
 are still alive*

BRITTANY

This next writer, who says about herself — "I am talented in making friends and helping people," gives us a very compassionate poem to her friend that passed away. And when she says, "But to calm myself down I just say you are still alive, you are always in my dreams and heart," we can't help but state the obvious. And that's though your friend is physically gone, she's still present through you. Your dreams, your heart and even your desire to help people are all things that keep her alive. We're sad to hear about your friend, but elated to know that she lives on through a very beautiful soul and that soul is the one you call yours. She's writing from San Juan County Juvenile Hall in Farmington, New Mexico.

RIP. Kailie Also Known As Weda

When my homie Weda died,
 I watched a lot of sad faces cry,
 Some with so much hate for the guy that did the drive by
 that night.

Now that you are gone things have changed so much,
 I just wanted to cry 'cause I don't have my Weda by my
 side.

If I could I would give my life just to see your smiling
 face
 one more time.

As I lay in my cell remembering the good times,
 I think of what you would be doin' in this day in life,
 But to calm myself down I just say you are still alive,
 You are always in my Dreams and Heart,
 Promise our friendship will never break apart!

I have a grip of love for my brother but the one that had a habit back then was a “gutter hype.” He was the worst of the worst. When he was hurting he’d do what he had to kill the pain — including taking family stuff to the connection. He’s made his peace with everyone but I also believe that if he could, anyone else could also.

read the rest of Rafael Cabrera’s BWO piece on page 40

